

DANTE STUDIES

with the Annual Report
of the Dante Society



CXXI

2003

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Edited by
STEVEN BOTTERILL

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Contents

Editor's Foreword	vii
Dante's Ulysses: Stoic and Scholastic Models of the Literary Reader's Curiosity and <i>Inferno</i> 26	1
GABRIEL PIHAS	
Reappraising Ekphrasis in <i>Purgatorio</i> 10	25
JAMES H. MCGREGOR	
Veronica: Dante's Pilgrimage from Image to Vision	43
ALESSANDRO VETTORI	
Embodiment in the <i>Commedia</i> : Dante's Exilic and Poetic Self-Consciousness	67
YEO WEI WEI	
"What is Truth?" The Architecture of the Early Chapters of <i>Convivio</i> , IV	95
STEPHEN BEMROSE	
Dante's Choice and Romance Narratives of Two Beloveds	109
OLIVIA HOLMES	
Dante's Stone Cold Rhymes	149
HEATHER WEBB	
American Dante Bibliography for 2002	169
STEVEN BOTTERILL	

Editor's Foreword

In this, the first issue of *Dante Studies* to appear under my editorship, I would like to begin by paying heartfelt tribute, on behalf of the entire Editorial Board, to outgoing editor Christopher Kleinhenz. In his many years at the helm of this journal Chris gave truly exceptional service to the Society and to scholarship, directing operations with a firm hand and unfailing good humor, and insisting throughout on maintaining the highest possible standards for the journal as for every other aspect of the Society's activity. His wise guidance enabled *Dante Studies* to strengthen its position at the center of the scholarly world's engagement with Dante, and his vision will continue to inspire us as we take the journal forward into the twenty-first century. *Dante Studies*, and Dante studies, have no stauncher friend than Chris Kleinhenz, and all of us who have worked with him over the years have profited by his example and learned to cherish his qualities as scholar, teacher and colleague. As the journal's new Editor it will be my constant concern to make sure that each successive issue is worthy of my predecessor's achievement.

Steven Botterill
Berkeley, California

Dante's Ulysses: Stoic and Scholastic Models of the Literary Reader's Curiosity and *Inferno* 26

GABRIEL PIHAS

Aristotle points out in the *Poetics* that although we are horrified to see corpses and disgusting animals in reality, we enjoy looking at them in imitations because we enjoy learning. Not accidentally, Augustine notes the attraction to these two particular kinds of horrible objects as an example of the evil of curiosity.¹ Our interest in imitations and our curiosity are similar insofar as both involve distanced ways of looking. But further, for Augustine, curiosity is at the very core of the spurious desire that pulls us away from ourselves, and makes us live in imitations. His wanderings in the *Confessions* have their anti-structure in the fictional representations of Aeneas' wanderings. The *Confessions* aim at pulling the reader away from fascination with such imitations and redirecting the mind towards the reality of one's own life.

Such an opposition between curiosity about literature and more morally directed reading was a common theme in Roman thought in general. Before Christianity, while Roman culture absorbed and emulated the more intellectual Greek culture, it remained hesitant about Hellenic impracticality and theoretical tendencies. Such hesitance appears in the writings of the Stoic Seneca. Seneca's discussion of literary studies in his letter on curiosity suggests Augustine's worries about Aeneas, and, as well, was the seed of Dante's encounter with Ulysses in *Inferno* 26. In what follows I will show how, in Seneca and Dante, the problem of philosophical curiosity is always intertwined with the less often studied problem of the curiosity of the reader of literature. Finally I will show how, in Aquinas,

Brunetto Latini, and Dante, a late medieval idea of the ambiguity of the reader's curiosity, as both vice and virtue, both high and low, was linked to a new realist direction in, and a new understanding of the reader of, narrative fiction.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Ulysses in the *Divine Comedy*. As many scholars have argued, he is the key to Dante's self-consciousness, and hovers over the entire epic: Ulysses' voyage is directly opposed to the voyage from Egypt to the promised land described in Exodus, insofar as it is opposed to the voyage of the angel-boatman in *Purgatorio* 2, whose passengers sing *In exitu Israel de Aegypto* (*Purg.* 2. 46 ff.). Therefore, if Charles Singleton is right in his claim that the Exodus theme is the overarching structure for the *Comedy*, then Ulysses' voyage is not at all an isolated story in *Inferno* 26. His presence is suggested in *Inferno* 1, in Dante's shipwreck (22–27), in *Paradiso* 33, in the image of Neptune looking up at the first hull ever to try his waters (94–6), and in a few places in between.² But the occasional appearances of Ulysses in the *Comedy* are merely points where an invisible but constant parallel between his journey and Dante's journey is made explicit. Ulysses was an anti-hero for the pilgrim Dante just as Virgil's Aeneas was for the wandering Augustine.

Furthermore, Ulysses is also conspicuous as the only hero of ancient mythology who has such a powerful presence in the *Divine Comedy*. That is, all of Dante's other important characters are historical figures, and nearly all are his contemporaries.³ A few mythological figures appear in passing (e.g., Achilles) or with mere allegorical value (e.g., Medusa), but only Ulysses appears as if he were a real individual, only he is given a long speech. Why Ulysses? Why not Aeneas or some other hero? Dante departs from the historical in *Inferno* 26 precisely because this canto is about his reasons for the representation of historical individuals. That is, Ulysses is the only mythological figure he gives such importance because he is using this canto to show the moral dangers inherent in such figures.

It has been contended by a number of scholars that *Inferno* 26 is about curiosity. Usually, this is taken to mean (as, for example, in Hans Blumenberg's account of Dante's Ulysses) that Dante opposes himself to the theoretical curiosity that draws Ulysses beyond the pillars of Hercules.⁴ This image of Ulysses and the pillars of Hercules will be taken up by numberless authors after Dante, most importantly by Francis Bacon. Ulysses' journey will suggest the battle cry for the rebellion against the old

limits set to human knowledge: *plus ultra*! The notion of a Dante who hesitates before theory and of a Ulysses who champions theory have stuck to Dante's text throughout the modern period, and continue to overdetermine the idea that we have of *Inferno* 26. No matter how positively or negatively we feel about the liberation of theoretical curiosity, the issue obscures what Dante presents to the reader at the beginning of his encounter with Ulysses in *Inferno* 26. Dante's burning curiosity to know where Ulysses went to die, which is at the center of the first part of the canto, cannot be fully addressed by the theory issue. Preoccupations about theoretical curiosity are profoundly important both for us and our times, as they were also for Dante and his times. But we must not forget that before secular literature became acceptable and common, curiosity was not only an issue for the philosopher, but also for the literary scholar, the literary reader, and the literary author. Hence we must pay more attention to the curiosity, not of Ulysses the explorer or the philosopher, but of Dante the reader who stands before Ulysses the literary character. Thinkers like Seneca, Lucian, Apuleius, Jerome, Augustine, Bernard, Bonaventure, and Aquinas, all took very seriously this variety of curiosity, which recently has been neglected in Dante studies (and in other literary studies) because the word "curiosity" had changed in meaning in the intervening centuries. It is the problem of a curious reader like Don Quixote, a problem that had enormous significance for the development of the Renaissance epic and the early modern novel. To focus on such a literary problem does not exclude contemporary questions about theoretical curiosity, but, as I hope to show, provides an invaluable complement to them.

1. Dante Between Seneca and Ulysses

The Ulysses who was so important to Dante was not a Ulysses derived only from ancient epic, but also, and much more deeply, from a letter in which the philosopher Seneca attacks curiosity. Although this letter is well known to scholars, it deserves much more careful attention than it hitherto has been given. In *Inferno* 26, curiosity is fundamentally understood, following Seneca, as a problem of the seductions of language and rhetoric, both in philosophic disputation and in poetry. Calling curiosity into question is Dante's form of literary-philosophical self-consciousness.

Dante's description of his encounter with Ulysses begins with an account of his own intense desire to see him. He is so intent on seeing him that he almost falls into the pit where Ulysses is punished:

Io stava sovra 'l ponte a veder surto,
sì che s'io non avessi un ronchion preso,
caduto sarei giù sanz'esser urto. (43–45)

"I stood on the bridge, having risen to look, / such that if I had not grabbed a rock / I would have fallen down without being pushed."⁵

The formulation in these lines closely resembles one of Brunetto Latini's formulations about curiosity in *Li livres dou tresor* (*The Books of the Treasure*): "Car la ou virtus s'efforce outre son pooir sans retenement de raison, lors chiet ele perilleusement." ("... When virtue exerts itself beyond its power for no good reason, then it falls perilously.")⁶ The problem of falling virtuosity suggested here also recalls Aristotle's image of a larger wrestler whose own weight causes him to fall more heavily than a smaller one, an image that Aristotle uses when distinguishing cleverness from prudence in the *Ethics*.⁷ The obvious significance of Dante's potential falling is that his own curiosity is similar to that of Ulysses and almost brings about his literal downfall, just as it does Ulysses' own. The danger of contagion in this canto is high, but simply because of what Dante always does in every level of hell—namely, he looks.

At this point in the canto we might treat his curiosity as simply theoretical. It is re-emphasized in the lines that follow. Displaying its intensity to Vergil, Dante makes an elaborate request:

... maestro, assai ten priego
e ripriego che il priego vaglia mille,
che non mi facci dell'attender niego
fin che la fiamma cornuta qua vegna:
vedi che del disio ver lei mi piego! (65–69)

"... Master, I pray you, / and pray you again, and may my prayer be worth a thousand, / do not deny me to wait / until the crowned flame comes here. / You see how I bend toward it with desire!"

In going to great lengths to emphasize the intensity of his curiosity, Dante creates a curiosity in the reader to know why he is so intent on speaking with Ulysses. When reading this canto for the first time, it comes as a

surprise to most that Dante's intense desire to speak with him is a desire to know where he went to die (79–84). The focus on the desire to know about Ulysses' death suggests the trace of Seneca, who had attacked exactly this type of desire.

Seneca's letter to Lucilius (letter 88) is the main source of inspiration for the canto of Ulysses and perhaps for the opening of the *Divine Comedy* itself. The passage in the letter that has attracted the most scholarly attention is the one most literally close to the content of the canto. In it Seneca attacks the liberal artists who study literature, and who were curious about the ending of Ulysses' story:

Quaeris Ulixes ubi erraverit potius quam efficias ne nos semper erremus? Non vacat audire utrum inter Italiam et Siciliam iactatus sit an extra notum nobis orbem . . . tempestates nos animi cotidie iactant et nequitia in omnia Ulixis mala inpellit. Non deest forma quae sollicitet oculos, non hostis; hinc monstra effera et humano cruore gaudentia, hinc insidiosa blandimenta aurium, hinc naufragia et tot varietates malorum. Hoc me doce, quomodo patriam amem, quomodo uxorem, quomodo patrem, quomodo ad haec tam honesta vel naufragus navigem.

Do you seek out where Ulysses' wanderings took him more than try to end our own perpetual wanderings? We don't have the leisure to hear whether it was between Italy and Sicily that he ran into a storm, or somewhere outside the area of the world we know, . . . when everyday our souls are running into our own storms, and driven into all the evils that Ulysses ever knew. We are not spared those beauties or enemies that attract the eyes. We too have to contend in various places with savage monsters rejoicing in human blood, insidious voices that flatter our ears, shipwrecks and all manner of misfortune. What you should be teaching me is how I may attain such a love for my country, my father, and my wife, and keep on course for those ideals even after shipwreck.⁸

This passage has been confused with an attack on the "morbid attraction" of knowledge about where Ulysses went to die that Dante enacts in *Inferno* 26, presumably something like the desire to look at a corpse.⁹ But the reader's interest in Ulysses' end is only accidentally a desire to look on death. The desire is specifically literary, the interest is in a fictional death of a famous hero. It is not morbid at all, but the mere extension of narrative desire, namely, the desire to know *how Ulysses' story ends*. The passage in Seneca's letter has deep significance for the *Divine Comedy* as a whole. The line about keeping one's "course for those ideals even after shipwreck" suggests the opening of the *Divine Comedy*, where Dante after shipwreck has lost the straight way ("*diritta via*") up the mountain.¹⁰

The reader who is curious about where Ulysses went to die suggests an obsessive reader much like Don Quixote, who almost takes up his pen to finish the stories of his favorite knights. The problem with this desire is that it is imaginative to the point of self-forgetting. The self-consciousness of Dante the pilgrim as reader of the fictional Ulysses is presented by Dante the author in order to suggest to his readers that they become more self-conscious about reading about the fictional journey of Dante.

In *Inferno* 26, Dante the pilgrim unselfconsciously wants to ask Ulysses exactly this question, the one Seneca scolds us for being curious about, namely, where his wanderings ended. Recent studies that address the Senecan text in Dante have wrongly taken this apparent lack of self-consciousness to suggest that, on this point, Dante was more free-spirited than the moralistic Stoic Seneca. This argument would have it that Dante cannot be so charmed by philosophy and morality as to give up literature.¹¹ Such a romantic reading of Dante is very tempting; but, while it is a nuanced reading of Dante, it is an insufficient reading of Seneca. It is insufficient first because Seneca also attacks a type of philosophical curiosity in the same letter; hence the question cannot be resolved by taking sides in a quarrel between poetry and philosophy. Second, it is insufficient because Seneca was not simply anti-literary, but himself produced works of literature. He had a sophisticated interest in a certain type of literature that was very attractive to the Middle Ages and to Dante, and that cannot be treated so dismissively. Specifically, like Dante, he demands a moral involvement in literature, and opposes literary escapism and art for art's sake. Seneca's claims in the letter, which critics find so distasteful, are essentially claims of literary realism.

To understand how Dante is treating Seneca, imagine a Dante who reads the letter and recognizes his own Quixotic tendency to waste time in frivolous curiosity about literary mythology. He then decides that he wants his own epic to avoid the escapism Seneca described. First, he might be confirmed in his decision to fill his epic with contemporary historical figures rather than the fantastic figures of myth who invite distracting curiosity. But, second, he would also realize that even this would not be enough, and that readers could become just as lost in curiosity about Dante the pilgrim as they could with mythological figures like Ulysses. Hence he would decide to break with his practice of using historical figures and instead dedicate a canto to Ulysses in which he would

explicitly raise the Senecan criticism of curiosity about his death. In designing this canto, he would try to explicitly renounce the kind of literary curiosity that Seneca has shown him to be empty, while at the same time making his readers aware of their own risks. The obvious solution, then, is for him to present himself falling into the danger of curiosity as Dante the pilgrim, while renouncing it as Dante the narrator. Which is precisely what we find in *Inferno* 26: the pilgrim, completely unrestrained, wants to know where Ulysses went to die, while the narrator, although very sympathetic to the *curiosi*, makes a speech asserting the need for self-consciousness and restraint:

Allor mi dolsi, e ora mi ridoglio,
quando drizzo la mente a ciò ch'io vidi,
e più lo 'ngegno affreno ch' i' non soglio,
. . . perchè non corra che virtù nol guidi;
sì che, se stella bona o miglior cosa
m' ha dato 'l ben, ch' io stessi nol m'invidi. (19–24)

“Then it pained me, and now it pains me once again, / as I direct my mind to what I saw, / and I rein in genius more than I usually do, / that it not run where virtue not guide it; / so that, if good star or better thing / has given me the good, I not envy myself of it.”

The restraint of genius here calls for a prudent halt to literary virtuosity. Prudence is a faculty that apprehends ultimates of which the virtuoso (as such) is unaware. Without prudence, virtuosity becomes meaningless or harmful, since poetic excellence is not suborned to some further, extra-technical end. The lack of restraint on the part of Dante the pilgrim is not an infinitely subtle snub at Seneca, as these critics would have it, but rather is precisely an example used to dramatize the straightforward Senecan claim.

In the second part of the canto (lines 90 ff.), the poet presents us with the story of curiosity coming to a bad end in Ulysses, a figure who resembles the poet himself. The pilgrim is saved by seeing his double, and the author hopes that the reader may be likewise saved by seeing his/her double. Attempts by recent critics to revive the romantic Dante, despite their awareness of Seneca's letter, show us that, no matter what Dante the author says or does, readers of his poem are still apt to fall into the trap of Ulysses. (In the same way, despite the poet's intentions, they still romanticize the passions of Paolo and Francesca.) These scholars fear they will

betray poetry by accepting the dominance of a moral perspective. But there is no reason to be defensive. Certain forms of poetry are wholly moral without being narrowly dogmatic, and can be beautiful without being narrowly aesthetic.

Highlighting the presence of Seneca's letter in *Inferno* 26 complements a different direction taken by twentieth-century scholarship. Dantists are now agreed that the problem of *Inferno* 26 is a problem of language, insofar as the sinners here are rhetoricians encased in tongues of fire, an inversion of the Pentecostal moment.¹² This linguistic hypothesis fits perfectly with Seneca's letter. Early in the letter Seneca describes the literary form of curiosity as a problem of an obsession with language. The philologists forget themselves in the illusion of fictional worlds and in over-attention to poetic language:

Quid horum ad virtutem viam sternit? Syllabarum enarratio et verborum diligentia et fabularum memoria et versuum lex ac modificatio—quid ex his metum demit, cupiditatem eximit, libidinem frenat?

Which of these paves the way to virtue? Diligence with words, analysis of syllables, a memory for myths, laws of verse? What is there in all this that puts down fear, roots out selfishness or reins in passion?¹³

Such a curiosity on the part of literary scholars is a linguistic virtuosity without a guiding motive.¹⁴ Lacking guidance, it becomes a solipsistic obsession with fictions that replace realities. In the closing paragraphs of Seneca's letter, the literary curiosity that Seneca previously highlighted is connected to philosophical curiosity, and again the root problem lies in the relation to language. Seneca attacks the confused mob of ancient metaphysicians who compete with each other in making various claims about the nature of being, and who fall into a skeptical vortex, ultimately leading to the claim that being is non-existent:

philosophi quantum habent supervacui, quantum ab usu recedentis! Ipsi quoque ad syllabarum distinctiones et coniunctionum ac praepositionum proprietates descenderunt et invidere grammaticis, invidere geometris . . . Sic effectum est ut diligentius loqui scirent quam vivere. Audi quantum mali faciat nimia subtilitas et quam infesta veritati sit. Protagoras ait de omni re in utramque partem disputari posse ex aequo et de hac ipsa, an omnis res in utramque partem disputabilis sit. Nausiphanes ait ex his quae videntur esse nihil magis esse quam non esse. Parmenides ait ex his quae videntur nihil esse universo. Zenon Eleates omnia negotia de negotio deiecit: ait nihil esse . . . Haec omnia in illum supervacuum studiorum

liberalium gregem coice; illi mihi non profuturam scientiam tradunt, hi spem omnis scientiae eripiunt. Satius est supervacua scire quam nihil. Illi non praeferunt lumen per quod acies derigatur ad verum, hi oculos mihi effodiunt. Si Protagorae credo, nihil in rerum natura est nisi dubium; si Nausiphani, hoc unum certum est, nihil esse certi; si Parmenidi, nihil est praeter unum; si Zenoni, ne unum quidem. Quid ergo nos sumus? Quid ista quae nos circumstant, alunt, sustinent?

How many superfluous and useless things are to be found in the philosophers. Even they have descended to the level of drawing distinctions between the uses of different syllables and discussing the properties of prepositions and conjunctions. They envy the philologist and the mathematician . . . with the result that they are more diligent in their speaking than in living. Listen and let me show you the evils too much subtlety can create, and what an enemy it is to truth. Protagoras says that in all things it is possible to argue both sides of any question with equal force, even the question whether or not one can really argue either side of a question! Nausiphanes says that of the things which seem to us to exist, none exists any more than it does not exist. Parmenides says that, of all these phenomena, none exists except the whole. Zeno of Elea has dismissed all such confusions by introducing another confusion: He declares that nothing exists . . . All these theories you should just throw on that heap of superfluous liberal studies . . . If I believe Protagoras, there is nothing certain in the universe. If I believe Nausiphanes there is just the one certainty, that nothing is certain. If Parmenides, only one thing exists; if Zeno not even one. Then what are we? The things that surround us, the things on which we live, what are they?¹⁵

The link between literary curiosity and that of these metaphysicians lies in speech. The loss of ourselves in speech is connected to the disappearance of the world, as the paired questions at the end of the quotation suggest. The scholars who devote an excessive amount of time to merely literary questions, and the philosophers who lose themselves in linguistic/logical zeal and thereby in senseless doctrines lose themselves alike in language. The philosophers lose themselves in disputes about grammar, and fall into nihilism under the illusion that the subtleties of linguistic expression correspond to things in the world. They lose themselves in their own linguistic virtuosity as rhetoricians, arguing both sides of any question to the point of paralyzing incoherence. In the same way, the literary scholars lose themselves in the linguistic virtuosity that distracts them from reality. Ulysses resembles the philosophers in Seneca's letter insofar as he wishes to go beyond moral reality into a "world behind the sun, without people" (117). His unending desire to push beyond unto

nothingness resembles the debates of Seneca's philosophers. (As I will argue later on in this essay, the problem of the disappearance of ourselves and our world that Seneca noted among the philosophers suggests to Dante the danger of Averroism.)

But although Dante takes Seneca's argument as the basis for *Inferno* 26, there is an important difference between them: for Dante, curiosity has a deep significance for politics and political rhetoric. Dante presents curiosity in *Inferno* 26 and 27 in connection with fraudulent political counselors, clever men who use their intellect to convince themselves and other men of imprudent (i.e., immoral) actions. In contrast, Seneca never even mentions politics in his letter. (In this political element we may detect the traditional view of Ulysses in Latin epic, especially the well-established presence in Dante's text of Ovid's manipulative Ulysses, described in the debate over the arms of Achilles in the *Metamorphoses*.¹⁶) For Seneca, curiosity is most dangerous when it perverts our philosophical capacity. In contrast, for Dante, the improper relationship to language in curiosity is most dangerous when the clever dialectician turns to political rhetoric, as in Ulysses' speech (the "orazion picciola", *Inf.* 26. 112–120).¹⁷

To sum up so far: through a reading of the first part of Seneca's letter on the reader's curiosity, we can understand Dante's interest in knowing where Ulysses went to die in the first part of *Inferno* 26, while through a reading of the end of Seneca's letter on the rhetorical wrangling involved in philosophers' curiosity, we can find suggestions of Ulysses the philosopher-rhetorician who desires to sail beyond the pillars of Hercules. The Senecan idea of curiosity as a literary-philosophical problem re-surfaces in Dante's near-contemporary, Thomas Aquinas.

2. Thomas Aquinas: "Studiositas" vs. "Curiositas"

In *Inferno* 26 Dante does not look down on Ulysses from a point of security. Instead he suggests that Ulysses is his dangerous twin, a twin whose attractions cannot be ignored but against which we must constantly be kept on our guard. We feel that Dante could not be a great poet if he is not something like Ulysses. This ambiguity has created immense confusion among readers. Where Dante wanted to present something that very closely resembled *curiositas* but was superior to it, readers mistook this for a repressed romantic love of *curiositas*.¹⁸ But, as is rarely noted, late medieval

philosophers had already repeatedly described *curiositas* as an evil twin of a good desire. This doubleness was strongly emphasized a few decades before Dante began writing *Inferno*, in the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas, and in the work of Dante's teacher, Brunetto Latini.

For Aquinas all knowledge in itself is good. The sin of *curiositas* is instead an ill-advised appetite for knowledge. In the *Summa Theologiae*, he divides such appetite into two kinds, intellectual and sensual (S.T. II-II q.167 a.1 and a.2.). Intellectual *curiositas* is further divided, on the one hand, into an appetite for knowledge that is evil only on account of the consequences of the appetite; these consequences include pride (and hence original sin) and the ability to commit other sins which knowledge brings, e.g., to know how to lie. The second aspect of intellectual *curiositas*, on the other hand, is the appetite which is a sin in itself. Aquinas divides this essentially sinful form into four traits: (i) zeal for the useless (his examples are comedy and love poetry¹⁹), (ii) interest in the illicit (i.e., demonology, fortune telling, magic, superstition), (iii) desire for knowledge of creatures without reference to their end in God, and (iv) interest in what is beyond our capacity to know. On the other hand, sensual *curiositas* is sub-divided into "speculative" and "practical". The "speculative" part is the desire to have sense-experiences which are useless distractions; the "practical" part is a desire for harmful end-directed sensual pleasures (Thomas' examples are the erotic *curiositas* that makes a lustful man desire to look at a woman, and the desire to know about the affairs of others so as to speak badly of those others). In opposition to all of these forms of the sin, Aquinas sets a virtue, *studiositas* (studiousness, earnestness).²⁰ *Studiositas* is thoughtfulness about the appetite for knowledge. It is the virtue that sees the goals towards which knowledge must be aimed and around which the sciences must be organized. It is the mean between *curiositas* and mental complacency. (It is essential to note that what we call "curiosity" today would include both *curiositas* and *studiositas*.) Thomas does not subdivide *studiositas* as he did *curiositas*, and hence is not explicit about the relation between *studiositas* and literature. However, given that literature is the object of *curiositas* when useless, one would expect that it could lie in the ambit of *studiositas* when useful. Hence, for example, the knowledge of literary aspects of sacred scripture (or even of secular literature) that aid one toward salvation would be the object of *studiositas*.

Thomas presents the questions on *curiositas* and *studiositas* as a sub-section of a larger set of questions on the virtue of modesty. In the medieval

lexicon, modesty is the virtue of self-consciousness (*S.T.* II-II qq.160–169). It is the generic form of four virtues, distinguished by the objects that they moderate. Within modesty we find (1) humility, the object of which is excellence (q.161); (2) *studiositas*, the object of which is knowledge (q.166); and two other virtues which lack names: (3) modesty in respect to the movement of the body, the objects of which include gestures, comportment, laughter, games, jokes, and dramatic representation (q.168), and (4) modesty with respect to dress and ornament of the body (q.169). A further dimension of the literary problem opens up in the articles on (3), modesty with respect to movement of the body. Thomas, taking up Aristotle's claim in the *Politics*, says that play is valuable insofar as it offers rest, as long as it is not in excess.²¹

Hence the status of literature here is not simply determined by the question of knowledge, but also by that of play. Play and *curiositas* are also linguistically part of the same system of oppositions in the Middle Ages insofar as play is opposed to the Greek "*spoude*" ("serious, earnest"), while the *curiosus* is opposed to the Greek "*spoudaios*" which Thomas translates as "*studiosus*". What binds play and the desire for knowledge, and what makes both dangerous, is the idleness from which they may originate. Both *curiositas* and excessive play are daughters of *acedia* (*S.T.* II-II q.35 a.4.).²² *Acedia*, as others have pointed out, suggests a demonic opposition to God which proudly seeks substitutes for spiritual goods by turning to lesser things.²³ *Acedia* may be translated as "sloth" or sometimes as "despair", but it borders on the modern meanings of boredom and melancholy.²⁴ It is potentially nihilistic; as Giuseppe Mazzotta describes it, it is an appetite for nothingness.²⁵ It suggests a lack of self-knowledge insofar as we attempt to replace a spiritual good, which we despise, with our own pleasure in knowledge or in entertainment. In his discussion of *acedia* Thomas makes clear the sin's potential significance for literature. After having called wandering a consequence of *acedia*, he sets out the various kinds of wandering, amongst which he places both curiosity and the movement of the body (i.e., the mode of dramatic representation in the articles on modesty):

Omnia autem alia quinque quae ponit ex *acedia* oriri pertinent ad evagationem mentis circa illicita. Quae quidem secundum quod in ipsa arce mentis residet volentis importune ad diversa se diffundere, vocatur *importunitas mentis*; secundum autem quod pertinet ad cognitivam, dicitur *curiositas*; quantum autem ad

locationem, dicitur *verbositas*; quantum autem ad corpus in eodem loco non manens, dicitur *inquietudo corporis*, quando scilicet aliquis per inordinatos motus membrorum vagationem indicat mentis; quantum autem ad diversa loca, dicitur *instabilitas*.

All the other five things that [Isidore] reckons as effects of *acedia*, are forms of the wandering of the mind after unlawful things: The tendency to wander, if it reside in the mind itself that is desirous of dispersing itself importunately in various things, is called *uneasiness of mind*; but if it pertains to knowledge, it is called *curiosity*; if it affect the speech it is called *loquacity*; and insofar as it affects a body that changes place, it is called *restlessness of the body*, when namely, a man shows unsteadiness of his mind by the disordered movements of his body; while if it causes the body to move from one place to another, it is called *instability*.²⁶

Nearly all of these divisions of the desire to wander have explicit literary import in the tradition from which Thomas drew: "loquacity" here suggests the story-telling and gossip associated with curiosity by Plutarch and Augustine; "restlessness of the body" for Thomas implies play, as well as the pacing that for Cassian symbolized *acedia*; "uneasiness of mind" and "instability", on the other hand, recall Augustine's characterizations of the quests of the epic heroes and the readers who follow or study them.

For Thomas as for Seneca, excessive interest in literature can be a sign of self-ignorance. In contrast, modesty is the virtue of self-knowing self-presentation, opposed to the pride implicit in *acedia*. All the kinds of modesty are directed, not at external objects, but at ourselves. Hence, for example, the question of drama (under the heading of modesty of bodily movement) is examined not in terms of books or plots, but as the question of whether an actor's performing is a good or bad activity for the actor. Similarly, curiosity is treated, not in terms of knowledge (which, Thomas says, is always good), but in terms of our appetite for knowledge. Hence, literature is regarded either as an aid or an obstacle to the self-knowledge of those involved in it directly, and who blur the distinctions between life and art, such as actors, or very serious authors or readers.

If we look back over Thomas' divisions of *curiositas*, we see that Dante the pilgrim, as well as Dante the author, is in danger of falling into every single one. From a monastic perspective, his literary text risks all the intellectual dangers of the scholasticism that lets Aristotle into the temple, and adds to them all the dangers of sensuality. His work is filled with figures of curiosity, including the very most gripping figures in the *Divine Comedy*:

Brunetto Latini, Ulysses, Averroes, Siger of Brabant, alchemists, fortune-tellers, comedians, and love poets. Above all, the figure of curiosity is Dante himself. He unites the figures of poet and seeker. He constantly finds himself berated by his guides for taking too much interest in what he sees.²⁷ At the climax of the *Paradiso*, the emphasis on the problem of curiosity returns (in the negative), when Dante is led to see God by the most famous enemy of curiosity in the late Middle Ages, St. Bernard of Clairvaux. As a whole, his journey beyond the earth towards a vision of the God too high for the human intellect is oriented by his comparison of his own shipwreck to Ulysses', the central symbol for the sin of *curiositas*.

Is Dante's ascent beyond the human really different from Ulysses'? They are indeed in an important way similar. While Ulysses is dissatisfied with the moral world, for Dante, the truth of divine mystery is above questions of human justice. In the *Paradiso* Dante will look down on the world like a Greek god, and call it famously "the little threshing floor that makes us so fierce" ("l'aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci", *Par.* 22.151). Much of the later part of the *Paradiso* is occupied with an attempt to show how the truth and the eternal are above any human analogs. However, it is an investigation of human freedom and a moral understanding of the human imagination, not a denial of the human ethical situation, that guides Dante towards the moment in which memory and speech dissolve. The two parts of his journey, the ethical-human and the contemplative-superhuman, are two in substance but one in direction. In the *Letter to Can Grande*, Dante says that his work is in the genre of practical philosophy, not speculative philosophy (paragraph 16). His contemplation in the *Divine Comedy* turns to the merely historical ethical world, and, to use Pseudo-Dionysius' terms, allows the superhuman sun of the divine mind to illuminate the uncertain and changeable world of human activity. This Dantean version of what Dionysius calls "spiral contemplation",²⁸ i.e., a contemplation that is both earthly and heavenly, accounts for what Hegel found so remarkable in how Dante "into changelessness plunges the living world of human action and suffering, and more particularly, the deeds and fates of individuals".²⁹ He rises towards God and the unrepresentable by contemplating human action and human freedom in the here and now. The *Divine Comedy* is neither an abstract nor simply a mystical contemplation that might make the reader incapable of attending to political and ethical responsibilities of the actual.

3. Thomism, Averroism, and Dante's Literary Realism

What is at stake in Aquinas' treatment of *curiositas* and *studiositas* is of course also intertwined with thirteenth century philosophical issues. Specifically, in the questions on *curiositas/studiositas*, he implicitly intends to defend philosophical inquiry against late medieval Augustinian resistance to philosophy. In Paris, the theological faculty's criticism of philosophy in Aquinas' lifetime was aimed at the Averroism that had gained currency in the arts faculty. Averroist teachings such as that of the unity of the intellect, the possibility of knowledge of separated substances in this life (a knowledge that would provide complete human happiness), and the radical separation of the intellect from the body, were immediately taken as heretical. By extricating Aristotle, and philosophy, from Averroism, Thomas hoped also to preserve them from those in the theology faculty who would stifle the teaching of philosophy altogether.

These debates at Paris about Averroist philosophical doctrines were based on fundamental concerns about the individual that had more than abstract significance. From the Thomistic perspective, the fundamental problem with Averroes' doctrines was that the knower that they described was identity-less. Such a knower is, like Odysseus, an *Oud-eis*, (Greek, "no one")³⁰:

Si quis autem velit dicere animam intellectivam non esse corporis formam, oportet quod inveniatur modum quo ista actio quae est intelligere, sit huius hominis actio, experitur enim unusquisque seipsum esse qui intelligit.

But if anyone wants to say that the intellectual soul is not the form of the body [as Averroes affirms], he must explain how it is that this action of understanding is the action of this particular man. For each individual is conscious that it is himself who understands.³¹

This was the upshot of all of the arguments Aquinas used, time and time again, against the Averroists: either he argued that the Averroistic knower was too high off the ground to have the individual sense-impressions, experience, and memory from which knowledge is derived, or he argued, conversely, that the subject who has such individual sense-impressions and experience cannot attain such perfect knowledge. Implicit in such Averroism, Aquinas also detected spiritual hybris. He notes that the Averroistic desire for the bodiless, unconditioned perspective is a desire to be God:

secundum eorum rationem, sequitur quod sit unus intellectus tantum in toto mundo, et non solum in hominibus. Ergo intellectus noster non solum est substantia separata, sed etiam est ipse Deus.

. . . according to [the Averroists'] reasoning, it follows that there is only one intellect in all the world, and not just in men. Therefore, our intellect would be not only a separate substance, but is in fact God Himself.³²

Furthermore, Averroes' theory also shows an undue worry about the plurality of the historically real, and excessive defensiveness about the relativity of individual knowing. Such a defensiveness is unnecessary because,

Est ergo unum quod intelligitur et a me et a te, sed alio intelligitur a me et alio a te . . . aliud est intelligere meum, et aliud tuum; et alius est intellectus meus, et alius tuus. . . . Non enim singularitas repugnat intelligibilitati.

. . . It is one thing which is understood both by me and by you. But it is understood by me in one way and in another way by you. . . . my understanding and your understanding are different, my mind and your mind are different. . . . [But] singularity does not exclude intelligibility . . .³³

Thomas' defense of individual memory and history suggests something of the nascent realism in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century literature. His influence on Dante has frequently been studied insofar as Thomism directed Dante towards theological orthodoxy. But while we may sometimes tend to treat Thomas as the doctrinal figure that he indeed became for the Church later on, he was not immediately thought of as orthodox. In the thirteenth century, with the rediscovery of Greek philosophy, philosophical study by members of the arts faculty expanded to unheard-of dimensions for the Middle Ages, threatening the precedent sovereignty of the theology faculty. This battle was ultimately between two ideas of Christianity: an Augustinian tradition which remained suspicious of new developments in philosophy (and one should point out that Aristotelianism was, in these times, once again, something new), and another which was open to synthesizing Christianity and Aristotelian thought. Although many of the Aristotelian theses condemned in those days were explicitly opposed to articles of faith, the battle became so fierce that many theses were condemned that had no heretical sense whatsoever, but were simply signs of a philosophically inclined mind. Of the philosophical and theological theses banned in 1277 at Paris, many were Thomas'.³⁴ It is useful

in the context of Dante's work to remember that Thomas thought of himself as a defender of philosophy against some of the hesitations of his times.

Like Thomas, Dante expresses a new philosophical openness and at the same time marks limits to it. At the beginning of *Purgatorio*, Dante learns to give up a philosophical self-confidence that would replace moral self-questioning with philosophical friendship (canto 2), and which would replace the need to be a part of the community of the faithful with the superhuman knowledge of God's nature (canto 3). Like Thomas' opposition to Averroism, Dante's opposition to the autonomy of philosophy at the opening of *Purgatorio* follows an emphasis on the terrestrial, insofar as the philosophy which he renounces is one which looks away from the human situation.

Dante's importance in the tradition of literary realism is tied to his self-conscious ambivalence about curiosity expressed in the figure of Ulysses. Dante's new interest in the concrete historical individual in the *Divine Comedy*, which Erich Auerbach saw as Dante's great achievement,³⁵ owes something, perhaps not directly to Thomas' particular arguments against Averroes, but to the suspicion of the identity-less knower that underlies them. That is, the Thomistic attack on the Averroism that abstracts from memory and sensation pointed in the same direction as the Dantean departure from the abstract figures of legendary and allegorical literature. In this sense, the representation of the historical individual cannot be developed under the Averroist, but only under the Thomistic ideal. Thomism points Dante towards a focus on the individual, a focus that also itself risks becoming the dangerous curiosity that Thomas himself described.

In Dante's philosophical-poetic treatise, the *Convivio*, Dante gave an account of man as a time-bound or death-bound individual. His attack on *curiositas* and his defense of philosophy precede a Ciceronian account of the four stages of life of the concrete individual, youth, maturity, old age, and extreme old age, and the virtues and vices associated with each.³⁶ Dante's focus on stages of the aging individual's life ultimately limits his defense of philosophical contemplation. The vice of Ulysses in *Inferno* lies in sailing out into the Atlantic in extreme old age. His attempted independence from death suggests an unwillingness to recognize and be reconciled to his own finite identity, and hence implies both a moral and an intellectual error. Meditation on God and moral reflection on one's own past life in extreme old age, which Dante describes as grounding all

reflection in that stage of life, are impossible for Ulysses.³⁷ The emphasis on time and his own aging at the beginning of *Inferno* 26 (7–12), and the theme of the stages of life from the *Convivio*, suggest that it is existence in time which defeats the aspiration of ageless wandering around the “circle of knowledge.” It is the presentation of the epic hero as an aging individual haunted by death (and not an endorsement of wandering) that makes possible the new kind of literature that Dante attempts in the *Comedy*.³⁸ The *Comedy* begins with the accidental, the age of the poet at the time of the action of the poem: “*Nel mezzo di cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai . . .*” (“In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself . . .”). As in *chiaroscuro* technique, the fundamental fact of the poet’s aging casts a shadow that makes his individual features and those of his characters suddenly visible. That is, awareness of aging, an awareness which Ulysses lacks, makes possible the realistic depiction of the concrete individual.

The ambiguity of Dante/Ulysses thus suggests a more complex picture of the late Middle Ages than the common one that merely opposes Dante as the authoritarian medieval vs. Ulysses the freethinker. Rather, in the Dante/Ulysses pair, a proto-renaissance man looks at his own limits. Such a late-medieval blurring of strong oppositions suggests the medieval origins of realism as recently re-proposed by Franco Moretti.³⁹ Moretti presents a version of Auerbach’s account of realism, where realism means taking “low” things seriously. For Moretti this account suggests that we turn to the Middle Ages, to Le Goff’s idea of purgatory as a middle realm, where people are “not entirely good and not entirely evil”, and to Huizinga’s idea of the waning “crudeness and clarity” of earlier medieval oppositions. Following Moretti’s emphasis, we can say that this middle realm is the realm of the weak oppositions between *curiositas* and *studiositas*.

Dante’s teacher Brunetto Latini saw curiosity in these same ambiguous terms.⁴⁰ As he put it in the prefatory chapter to his account of curiosity in his encyclopedia, *Li livres dou tresor* (*The Books of the Treasure*):

Cognoissance est a conoistre et deviser les vertus des visces ki ont samblance des vertus . . . uns chevaus de fust dechut ciaus de Troie, pour çou k’il fainst la forme de Minerve . . .” (“Knowledge is knowing and describing the qualities of the vices which resemble virtues . . . A wooden horse fooled the people of Troy because it had the form of Minerva . . .”)⁴¹

Curiositas is thus a Trojan horse of the mind, a double for a gift, because Minerva represents real wisdom. It is an image of the goddess, and yet inside it contains treachery. It should be no surprise, then, that Dante's presentation of curiosity is so ambiguous. Although *curiositas* is a sin for Aquinas, he repeatedly points out that knowledge in itself is never evil. Furthermore, he is at pains to emphasize the fact that *curiositas* is part of a pair, *studiositas-curiositas*, where *studiositas* is a positive version of the desire to know, and *curiositas* is the bad form of this desire. Latini suggests curiosity is a "vice that resembles a virtue", and claims that curiosity is like the Trojan horse. Along these lines one can easily explain Dante's picture of an attractive Ulysses, who is, none the less, damnable.

This ambiguity of what we today call "curiosity", and of what Aquinas called both *curiositas* and *studiositas*, thus also explains the last century of scholarly wrangling over this canto. Dante scholars have argued back and forth *ad infinitum* about whether Dante thinks that Ulysses is evil because of his curiosity, or whether he thinks he is evil for some other reason. Scholars who favor Ulysses argue that his philosophical curiosity is something good. They argue that he is presented too positively, and resembles Dante too closely, for him to be in hell for precisely a quality that makes Dante's journey successful. This view is one-sided. Of course Ulysses is in hell for his *curiositas*, and also for all the other moral problems connected to his *curiositas*, like treachery. Of course it is also true that he is presented positively and that he resembles Dante very closely. We should add Latini's and Thomas' words: Ulysses resembles Dante very closely, as "a vice that resembles a virtue", or as *curiositas* resembles *studiositas*. When Benedetto Croce made Ulysses into a trace of the "poetry" that overcame Dante's rigid "theological" tendencies, he was simply unaware that late medieval ethics was as subtle as Latini and Aquinas are on this point.

Of course, the ambiguity of vice and virtue is not a problem limited to the sin of Ulysses. In the *Inferno*, Dante presents something very similar in his treatment of Cavalcante di Cavalcanti, Paolo and Francesca, Pier della Vigna, Brunetto Latini, and Ugolino, to name just a few.⁴² What appeals about them is the way Dante lets us see many vices that come so close to resembling his own virtues, and lets us see the vices to which he himself had been prone. In these close and sympathetic looks at these characters, Dante is continually presenting us with the ambiguities of historical reality. It is precisely because he presents ambivalent pictures of things like

curiosity that he has been taken by Hegel, Auerbach, Lukács, and many others, as a transitional figure on the way to the modern novel.⁴³

We should not take Dante's psychological realism simply as an openness to curiosity, however much such a reading would accord with our own narratives of progress. His new interest in placing fully embodied historical individuals into a literary texts falls in line with the anti-curiosity arguments outlined by Seneca. For both the Stoic and the poet, the danger of literature is escapism from one's own problems. Dante is an innovator in part precisely because he is conservative with regard to curiosity, reviving old Stoic concerns: He wishes to battle the curiosity that escapes the world in literature by returning literature into historical reality. His realist tendency lies in his openness to lose himself in the particular characters. But this openness in turn lies in his affirmation of the moral focus on historical reality, and in his opposition to the curiosity that seeks the imaginary world of myth. Hence Dante became more open about taking historical reality seriously in literature because of his very battle with literature, a battle resembling the battle between Cervantes and the fantastic novels of chivalry. Just as Cervantes never simply hates Don Quixote and his love of chivalry novels, but rather identifies with them, so also Dante never hates Ulysses. But for both authors the figure in question is undeniably in error.

Dante's self-consciousness about curiosity differs from that of the literature that appears after him, e.g., in Boccaccio, Chaucer, Ariosto, Rabelais, or Cervantes, because, in these later works, the ancient novel has already been rediscovered. The writers in the centuries after Dante took the theme of curiosity fully formed from the parodies of literary and philosophical curiosity in Lucian and/or in Apuleius, and then applied it to their own cultures; whereas Dante apparently arrived at similar themes without reading these novels. But Dante's precocity suggests that the discoverers of these ancient novels fully benefited from their discovery because their culture was in a sense already looking for them.

NOTES

1. Augustine speaks of the crowds attracted to corpses and also speaks of the pleasure in watching lizards and spiders kill their prey. See *Confessions* X, sections 55–57, in Augustine, *Confessions*, edited and translated by Pierre de Labriolle, vol. 2 (Paris: Association Guillaume Budé, Les Belles Lettres, 1989).

2. Apart from the scene in *Par.* 27. 83, where Dante looks back over Ulysses' journey, references to Dante's journey as a sea-voyage allude to the Ulysses problem (e.g., "la navicella del mio ingegno" [*Purg.* 1. 2]), the warning to the reader about following his "legno" in *Par.* 2. 1–6, etc.).

3. This point was noted in a chapter by John A. Scott, "L'Ulisse dantesco", in *Dante magnanimo: studi sulla Commedia* (Firenze: Olschki, 1977), 117–18. A briefer version of this chapter was published in English as "Inferno XXVI: Dante's Ulysses" in *Lettere italiane* 23 (1971): 145–186. His accounting for Ulysses' uniqueness is somewhat inelegant, however; see the Italian version of the article, 167–69. Maria Corti, *Dante a un nuovo crocevia* (Firenze: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1982), 86, attempts to resolve the problem in another way by claiming that at bottom Ulysses is really a disguised contemporary of Dante's, namely, Boethius of Dacia. But this would not explain why Dante would be forced to use a disguise for a contemporary in this canto, when he never feels the need to do this anywhere else. (Esotericism could not account for this because there is nothing politically dangerous about publicly putting a radical Aristotelian in hell.)

4. Hans Blumenberg, "The Trial of Theoretical Curiosity", in *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, translated by Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983), 259–455 (338–42). Readers have seen in Dante's Ulysses spectators like the Latin Averroists and explorers like Christopher Columbus, free individuals who at enormous personal risk put tradition and convention aside, setting out for adventures in the unknown and infinite. See Maria Corti's interesting attempt to relate Ulysses to Boethius of Dacia, in *Dante a un nuovo crocevia*, 85–97, and Antonio Gagliardi's similar attempt to link Ulysses to Averroes' commentary on the *De anima*, in *Ulisse e Sigeri di Brabante: Ricerche su Dante* (Catanzaro: Pullano, 1992), 44–64. On medieval exploration, see Nardi, "La tragedia di Ulisse," in *Dante e la cultura medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1949), 153–65.

5. All translations from Latin and Italian texts are mine; however, for the translations of Seneca I consulted *Seneca, 17 Letters*, edited and translated by C.D.N. Costa (Westminster, U.K.: Aris and Phillips, 1988).

6. *Li livres dou tresor*, edited by Francis J. Carmody (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), II.70. For a translation, see *The Books of the Treasure*, translated by Paul Barrette and Spurgeon Baldwin, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, vol. 90, Series B (New York and London: Garland, 1993).

7. For the ancient and medieval Aristotelians, prudence implies self-knowledge and an understanding of the particular means that one finds in one's life which conduce to the end of human life. By definition, the prudent man must also be morally good. Aristotle distinguishes prudence (*phronesis*) from morally neutral cleverness (*deinoteis*) (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1144a23–36). Citing Aristotle, Dante makes the same distinction in a passage in the *Convivio*: "Conviensi adunque essere prudente, cioè savio; . . . e però non è da dire savio uomo chi con sottratti e con inganni procede, ma è da chiamare astuto; ché, sì come nullo direbbe savio quelli che si sapesse bene trarre della punta d'uno coltello nella pupilla dell'occhio, così non è da dire savio quelli che bene sa una malvagia cosa fare, la quale facendo, prima sé sempre che altrui offende, se bene si mira." ("One should then be prudent, that is, wise . . . We should not call "wise" the one who makes his way by underhandedness and trickery; the proper term for him is "clever". Just as no one would call a person wise if he knew how to drive the tip of a knife through the pupil of the eye, so in general a person does not deserve to be called wise that knows how to do something evil, the very doing of which always inflicts self-injury before it ever injures others, if examined carefully.") *Convivio*, IV. xxvii. 5. For Aristotle, prudence is always a virtue and implies the presence of cleverness, but cleverness is distinct from it and is sometimes not a virtue but a defect. Aristotle compares the clever man to an enormous wrestler, whose weight sometimes causes him to hit the ground with more force than would a smaller wrestler (*Nic. Eth.* 1144b1–17).

8. Letter 88 (see Costa, 72–73)

9. Rocco Montano, *Dante filosofo e poeta* (Napoli: Conte-G. B. Vico Editrice, 1985), 208–09.

10. Dante defines the term "*diritta via*" in a Ulysses-related passage in the *Convivio* in which he describes good and bad lives as journeys. These journeys are compared to types of desire of the eyes for visible objects. Just as the wandering Ulysses' vision is never satisfied, so also when the soul takes the wrong and longer path, its vision is never satisfied. For the sake of space, I will quote this very

long passage (*Convivio*, IV. xii. 14–19) only in English, with a few Italian terms in brackets. The passage not only illuminates *Inferno* 26, but Dante's pilgrimage as a whole: "[t]he ultimate desire in anything, and the first given in nature, is the desire to return to its first cause. Since God is the first cause of our souls, and makes them in His own likeness . . . the soul desires most of all to return to Him. As a pilgrim that goes along a road he has never walked before believes every house he sees in the distance is an inn, and, finding that it is not, redirects his belief onto another house, and so he moves from house to house, until he comes to the inn, so with our incontinent soul: as soon as it enters onto the new and never traveled road of this life, it directs its eyes to the goal of its ultimate good; and therefore whatever it sees that appears to have some good in it, the soul believes to be the ultimate good . . . So we see children desiring most of all an apple; then, going on a little further on, desiring a little bird; then, still further on, desiring beautiful clothes; then a horse; then a woman; then a little money; then a lot of money; then even more. This happens because it finds in none of these things what it seeks, and it believes it will find it a little further on. Thus, it can be seen that, to the eyes of our soul, one desirable object stands in front of another as if in a pyramid, so that the smallest desirable object obscures all the others and is like the apex of the ultimate desirable object, God, who is the foundation of all the others in the pyramid . . . the further one goes towards the foundation, the greater the desirable objects that appear; this is why, having acquired things, human desires expand, one after the other. The right road [*cammino*] of this journey is lost just as with earthly roads . . . Just as the road going straight [*dirittissima*] to the city fulfills desire and brings rest after his effort, and the road which goes in the opposite direction never fulfills desire and cannot bring rest, so too, in our life. The good traveler reaches the goal and finds rest. *The wandering one [camminatore erroneo] never reaches the goal: but straining his mind with much effort, he looks ahead of him with his greedy eyes [occhi gulosi].*" [Emphasis mine.] The image of the pyramid is here a visual cone, as in medieval optics. The description of desire in terms of the visual cone immediately suggests curiosity (the lust of the eyes) as wrong desire.

11. See Michelangelo Picone, "Dante, Ovidio, e il mito di Ulisse", in *Lettere italiane*, 43 (1991): 500–17 (on Seneca and Dante see especially 501–02). (Leaving aside the comments on Seneca, Picone's reading of the relation between Ovid and Dante is illuminating.) The most recent monograph on Seneca in Dante, by Giuseppina Mezzadrolì, makes the same error as Picone. In another part of the letter we have been looking at, Seneca says that liberal artists' readings of Homer that make him narrowly pertain to philosophical schools are arbitrary. The scholars, according to Seneca, pick whatever school of thought they please, and fight uselessly about whether Homer was an Aristotelian, a Platonist, a Stoic, an Epicurean, etc. Mezzadrolì takes this as an indication of Seneca's lack of sympathy for a philosophical literature that can offer a profound message: see Giuseppina Mezzadrolì, *Seneca in Dante* (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1990), 106–119. But this is impossible if we think of Seneca's own productions; and, furthermore, Seneca is simply right. Homer is not a Platonist, an Aristotelian, a Stoic or an Epicurean. A reading that makes him all of these is incoherent, just as Seneca says. Contemporary readers like Mezzadrolì and Picone do not sufficiently address the fact that Seneca in himself, and, *a fortiori*, Seneca for Dante, was not an enemy of poetry, but a dramatic poet.

12. The importance of the question of language in *Inferno* 26 has been noted by a vast number of scholars. Of specific interest for the political and theological issues that I discuss below are Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Ulysses: Persuasion vs. Prophecy," in *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*, edited by Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 348–56; Maria Corti, "On the Metaphors of Sailing, Flight, and Tongues of Fire in the Episode of Ulysses (*Inferno* 26)," in *Stanford Italian Review*, 9 (1991): 33–47; and Peter S. Hawkins, "Virtuosity and Virtue: Poetic Self-Reflection in the *Commedia*", in *Dante Studies*, 98 (1980): 1–18.

13. Seneca, in Costa, 72–73.

14. Empty virtuosity is the famous charge which Dante makes against the other poetasters of his day in the *Vita Nuova*, viz., that they do not know how to denude their poems so as to arrive at the meaning. In contrast, in the Ulysses canto, Dante pierces through the illusions of his own poetry.

15. Seneca, in Costa, 84–87.

16. For the importance of Ovid in *Inferno* 26, see Lino Pertile, "L'ingegno di Ulisse", in *Stanford Italian Review*, 1 (1979): 35–65, especially 36–42. Also see Picone's suggestion (514) that Ovid's scene of Ulysses departing from Circe in Ovid is the "fonte classica" for *Inferno* 26. (On this see also Giorgio Padoan, "Ulisse 'fandi fitor' e le vie della sapienza," in *Studi danteschi*, 37 [1960]: 21–61, especially 32; and Barbara Reynolds, "Dante's Tale of Ulysses," in *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli: sezione romanza*, II, [1960]: 49–66.) Ovid's Ulysses is indeed important in the canto, but cannot account for the worry about literary curiosity without the other classical source in Seneca.

17. The major distinction between Seneca and Dante is the same as the one between Dante and Augustine. The important difference on politics, as well as the difference between their literary works, is owed to root differences in their attitude towards history, not morality. Although Seneca portrays legendary figures, while Dante portrays his contemporaries, both think that morality is essential to literature. For an eloquent statement of Dante's characteristic attitude towards history contrasting it with the classical Roman view, see Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 6–7 and 147–91.

18. This debate is repeatedly rehearsed in practically every scholarly article on the subject. I will not repeat it in full here. Teodolinda Barolini gives a recent and concise account of the positions taken by twentieth-century critics on this issue in her "Dante's Ulysses: Narrative and Transgression", in *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Amilcare A. Iannucci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 113–32.

19. Thomas cites Jerome on this point: "Hence Jerome says [*Epist. xxi ad Damas]: 'We see priests forsaking the gospels and the prophets, reading stage-plays, and singing the love songs of pastoral idylls.'" *S.T. II-II* q.167 a.1

20. He intends the term as a translation of the Greek *spoudaios*, usually translated "earnestness" or "seriousness", sometimes simply as "good". In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the text from which Thomas would presumably have become interested in the Greek word, the *spoudaios aner* ("good man") is the central figure, from his appearance in the opening pages of Book 1 to his role at the end in the crucial choice of the philosophic life in Book 10. The *spoudaios aner* is the yardstick for all ethical decisions; whatever he does is right. So, the general import that he has in Aristotle suggests that for Thomas, curiosity is a very general issue, and not something simply related to book-learning or theory.

21. *Summa Theologiae* II-II q.168 a.2; *Politics* 1337b36–1338a1. In this context Thomas does not discuss other uses of music which Aristotle mentions, e.g., *katharsis* and the habituation to the *kalos* through melody.

22. On this connection see the discussion in Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, translated by Daniel F. Coogan (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 200–01.

23. See Blumenberg, 334–36.

24. On the modern transformation of *acedia* see Giorgio Agamben, *Stanze* (Torino: Einaudi Paperbacks, 1993), 5–19.

25. Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 138.

26. Italics mine. *S.T. II-II* q.35 a.4 r.3.

27. For example, Dante is corrected by Virgil for looking at a fight (*Inf.* 30), at Virgil not casting a shadow (*Purg.* 3), at the interest others show in him (*Purg.* 5). Beatrice corrects Dante for his desire to see the moon spirits more clearly (*Par.* 3) and for his desire to see the body of John (*Par.* 26).

28. Pseudo-Dionysius calls this "spiral contemplation" because it unites earthly thinking (symbolized by the straight line) with heavenly thinking (symbolized by the circle). See "On the Divine Names," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, translated by Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), especially 138.

29. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, translated by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 1103.

30. *Oudeis* is the word that Homer plays on in the scene with the Cyclops, from which experience Odysseus learns to check his excessive curiosity without extinguishing it.

31. *S.T. I*, q.76 a.1, "respondeo".

32. *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas Parisienses*, ch. 5, edited and translated by Curé Bandel, in *Opusculs de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, vol. 3 (Paris: Vrin, 1984), 248–310 (302). [Reproduction, with same pagination, of text and translation of the Vives edition (Paris, 1857, vol. 2.) and of the Leonine edition (Rome, 1976, vol. 43).]

33. *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas Parisienses*, ch. 5, in Bandel, 304.

34. Of course, there is nothing to indicate that Thomas himself was ever blocked from teaching by censorship. The point I am trying to make here is that he did not simply take the conservative side.

35. See for example, Erich Auerbach, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, translated by Ralph Manheim (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961 [1988]), 174–75.

36. The treatment of curiosity appears in *Convivio*, IV. xii. 11–xiii. 10. The stages of life are then described in IV. xxiv–xxviii.

37. On the contemplation of God in old age described in Ulyssean terms, see *Convivio* IV. xxviii.2–7: “. . . la nobile anima nella ultima etade . . . ritorna a Dio, sì come a quello porto onde ella si partìo quando venne ad intrare nel mare di questa vita; . . . come lo buono marinaio, come esso appropinqua al porto, cala le sue vele, e soavemente, con debile conducimento entra in quello; così noi dovemo calare le vele delle nostre mondane operazioni e tornare a Dio con tutto nostro intendimento e cuore . . . O miseri e vili che colle vele alte correte a questo porto, e là ove dovereste riposare, per lo impeto del vento rompete, e perdetes voi medesimi là dove tanto camminato avete!” (“. . . the noble soul in the final stage of life . . . returns to God as to the port from which it departed when it came to enter on the sea of this life . . . Just as a good sailor, as he approaches port, lowers his sails and enters gently, slowly guiding his ship in, so ought we to lower the sails of our worldly affairs and turn to God with all our understanding and heart . . . How wretched and vile you are who rush into this port under full sail, there where you ought to come to rest, and are broken by the force of the wind; you lose yourselves on the very spot to which you have been journeying so long!”) The Ulyssean rush to the shore of the afterlife (Purgatory) enacts the sailing too fast into port that Dante counsels against here. Intriguingly, in this part of the *Convivio* Dante speaks of Guido da Montefeltro and his turn away from worldly things at the end of his life. In the *Inferno* he will be punished along with Ulysses for failing to maintain this turn.

38. John Freccero, “Dante’s Ulysses: From Epic to Novel”, in *The Poetics of Conversion*, edited by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 136–51.

39. Franco Moretti, “L’anima e le cose,” in *Realismo ed effetti di realtà nel romanzo dell'Ottocento* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1993), especially 27–28. Also of interest in this connection is Moretti’s accounting for the *Bildungsroman* in terms of the socialization of extremist individuals (29). In these terms Dante would be the socialized individual, Ulysses the younger extremist.

40. Scholars have been confused about Latini’s role in this canto by a much-cited chapter by Fiorenzo Forti, “‘Curiositas’ or ‘fol hardement?’,” in *Magnanimitate: Studi su un tema dantesco* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1977), 161–206. Forti’s thesis is that Dante’s Ulysses is not a symbol of *curiositas*, but of *fol hardement* (200–04). *Fol hardement* means overboldness, an excess of courage that, in Latini’s *Tresor*, is described as a danger that attends great-souledness. Against what Forti claims, there is nothing to suggest that this concept of *fol hardement* excludes *curiositas*. He gives the impression that Latini had said nothing about curiosity, when in fact he raises the issue in three chapters (II. 68–70), and even suggests that *curiositas* is analogous to or a form of *fol hardement* in II. 68. If we are to maintain Forti’s stress on magnanimity, we must at least change the “o” in the title to an “e”; that is, we should not ask “‘Curiositas’ o ‘fol hardement?’”, but rather say “‘curiositas e fol hardement’”.

41. *Livres dou Tresor*, II. 68

42. Something similar might be said of Dante’s sympathy for imperfect, ambiguous figures like Manfred in *Purgatorio* or Piccarda in *Paradiso*.

43. For a survey of prominent theorists of the novel who give Dante an important role as precursor of movements in modern literature, particularly in relation to the modern novel, see Vittorio Russo, *Il romanzo teologico: sondaggi sulla Commedia di Dante* (Naples: Liguori, 1984), 19–30.

Reappraising Ekphrasis In *Purgatorio* 10

JAMES H. MCGREGOR

Dante's first experience on the terrace of pride in *Purgatorio* 10 is unusual in that it is an aesthetic rather than a personal encounter. Dante admires three increasingly marvelous scenes sculpted in bas-relief on the vertical inner rim of the terrace. These scenes depict the Annunciation; David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant; and Trajan supplicated by the widow. While only one of the scenes is rooted in classical rather than Biblical history, their presentation in the poem recalls celebrated, canonical passages in ancient epic. Homer's description of the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18 laid the foundation for a long tradition of ekphrasis—generally understood as the description of works of visual art—in the genre. Vergil's description of sculpted scenes on the Temple of Juno in Carthage and Aeneas' reaction to them in *Aeneid* 1 are both successor to Homer and inspiration for Dante's scenes in *Purgatorio* 10. An influential recent study of ekphrasis in the epic tradition has treated the trope uniformly as one in which the writer asserts the superiority of his medium, narrative, over visual representation. Thomas Heffernan, the author of this study, argues that by asserting the power of language over the unspoken, ekphrasis re-enacts the dialectic of paternity in which the masculine *logos* asserts control over the pre- or non-verbal feminine.

Accepting such a view raises serious questions not only about the best way to read *Purgatorio* 10, but about Dante's language in general. It forces us to see Dante's bow to the visual arts as a seeming tribute that transforms itself into a claim of superiority. In this it would seem to replicate on an artistic level something that can plausibly be linked to the sin of pride. I believe, however, that Heffernan's characterization of Dante's ekphrasis is incorrect; and that his reading inverts the extraordinary tribute to the

power of visual art and Dante's own aspirations to a visual language that the canto discloses.

Dante's ekphrasis differs in an important but previously unnoticed way from the approaches of his partners, Vergil and Homer, in what Heffernan has identified as a "canonical genealogy" of the trope in Western writing.¹ As Michael Putnam has unequivocally declared, Vergil—the fellow *triumvir* Dante actually read and the one with most significant influence on his work—based his ekphrasis on "works of art which, however palpable in the text, are figments of Vergil's imagination."² Heffernan argues that Dante follows suit, but I will argue here that Dante approached ekphrasis differently. Alone among the pioneers of ekphrasis, he described two 'imagined' works of art that his readers readily recognize from familiar frescoes, sculptures, or book illuminations.³ He added a third scene that has been convincingly linked to a work of visual art. Unlike the imagined artworks described by Vergil and Homer, then, which readers must visualize with guidance from texts alone, I will demonstrate that Dante's scenes engage a long tradition of visual iconography. While the poet's interest in the visual arts and the possible influence of such works on the *Commedia* have been subjects of interest in the scholarship, the role artworks play in this key passage that I describe has not been recognized.

Dante and visual art

Dante scholars and art historians have repeatedly examined the poet's interest in and knowledge of the visual arts. Their investigations have been inconclusive, when they have not been frankly dismissive of direct connections. The art historian Julius von Schlosser famously declared that "Dante non ha mai cercato di tradurre un'opera d'arte figurativa nel linguaggio a lui proprio".⁴ Fortunato Bellonzi is even more absolute: "E' dubbio che nella stessa *Commedia* avvenga di individuare reali frutti di una esperienza dantesca delle arti medievali o delle antiche."⁵ In the face of such conviction, it may seem foolhardy to suggest that the ekphrasis in *Purg.* 10 does indeed represent Dante's experience of and response to actual works of visual art, but in fact there is no contradiction. Schlosser's and Bellonzi's statements, like those of the many others who have worked in this area, assess efforts to connect particular works of art, particular artists or particular period styles with Dante's poem. This approach is

taken for granted by Ferruccio Ulivi, perhaps the most significant analyst of the relations between Italian literature and the visual arts. He confirms the general practice when he announces that in comparing the *Commedia* with the visual arts “è necessario sottrarsi a presunte, generiche similarità.” I agree that the particular works of art these scholars have turned to as presumed sources have proved disappointing, but I would argue that the “generic similarities” which they have discounted are the very ones that matter in this canto. It is true that Dante’s presentation of the scenes in *Purg.* 10 does not reflect his knowledge of *individual* works by Giotto or Cimabue, of Romanesque as opposed to Gothic conventions. His ekphrasis does, however, reflect the normal visual iconography of his period.

Iconography

Two of the scenes Dante represents had long Biblical and exegetical histories as well as established iconographic traditions. The Annunciation, which Dante presents first, is among the most common scenes in medieval art.⁷ The second scene, David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant, though far less commonly represented, would certainly be familiar to many if not most of Dante’s readers. Rarely the subject of sculpture or fresco painting, the scene can be found in illustrated Bibles, but it is most common in devotional books like Psalters.⁸ There has been a good deal of speculation about the link between a surviving work of Roman art and the third scene represented in canto 10, Trajan and the widow.⁹ While this final scene lacks a fixed and readily recognizable iconographic form, it too, as others have argued, testifies to Dante’s engagement with real works of visual art.

Scene 1: The Annunciation

Dante describes the Annunciation in twelve much quoted lines:

L’angel che venne in terra col decreto
De la molt’ anni lagrimata pace,
Ch’aperse il ciel del suo lungo divieto,
Dinanzi a noi pareva sì verace
Quivi intagliato in un atto soave
Che non sembiava imagine che tace.
Giurato si saria ch’el dicesse ‘Ave!’;

Perché iv' era imaginata quella
Ch'ad aprir l'alto amor volse la chiave;
E avea in atto impressa esta favella
'*Ecce ancilla Dei*', propriamente
Come figura in cera si suggella. (*Purg.* 10. 34–45)

When Dante wrote these lines, he may have had a particular representation in his mind's eye. Which representation that might have been would probably be undiscoverable, and is in any case unimportant. Rather than helping us to identify one particular image of the scene, Dante's description evokes generic qualities common to many medieval representations of the Annunciation, whether they are Late Antique, Romanesque, or Gothic. Dante can count on the fact that his reader—who has certainly seen not one but many examples of this widely represented episode—will picture it easily and appropriately on the basis of this visual experience.

The truly visual elements in the scene are very spare. The sculpted angel is caught in “un atto soave” (38). This is hardly a characterization of any particular gesture or posture. The cliché ‘soave’ suggests that the angel is amiable and well mannered and that his demeanor is anything but threatening. His pleasant image appears to speak. Indeed it/he appears to say the word ‘*Ave*,’ while Mary’s posture reflects the humble acceptance of God’s will implicit in her words, “*Ecce ancilla Dei*.” These postures are familiar features of representations of the Annunciation before 1300:

Gabriel, his hand outstretched to indicate that he is addressing or pointing to Mary, stands before the seated Virgin, or he walks towards her, a movement which may be expressed either by the figure’s striding posture or by its standing on tiptoe. Both are shown either in full or half-profile, the angel standing on the right of the scene.¹⁰

Mary’s humble gesture is common in medieval representations:

Mary’s acquiescence, too, her obedient willingness to accept God in good faith, is suggested by the inclination of her head, a motif which goes back to interpretations of the psalter (Ps 45:10)¹¹

Dante makes no reference to the intimate domestic setting of the Annunciation that was common in frescoes and manuscript illuminations of his

period. He does not describe Mary as weaving or reading when the angel comes upon her. Nor does he describe the visual symbol most familiar to us, the representation of the power of divine conception in the form of a dove.¹² As Schiller notes, however, "In western art of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the dove is still uncommon."¹³ Indeed, details missing from Dante's description are most commonly found in paintings of the Annunciation; small reliefs, of which there are many from the late Antique period to the Gothic, or sculptures representing the scene, which are common in Romanesque and Gothic churches, do not typically include these details. If we take Dante at his word and compare his Annunciation only with sculpted examples, his reliance on gesture and little else to characterize the scene is true to the tradition

Compared with these stripped down sculptural representations of the Annunciation, Dante's few visual references seem typical; still, they do not tie his scene unequivocally to the visual as opposed to the textual tradition. A comparison of the scene in *Purgatorio* with the scene described

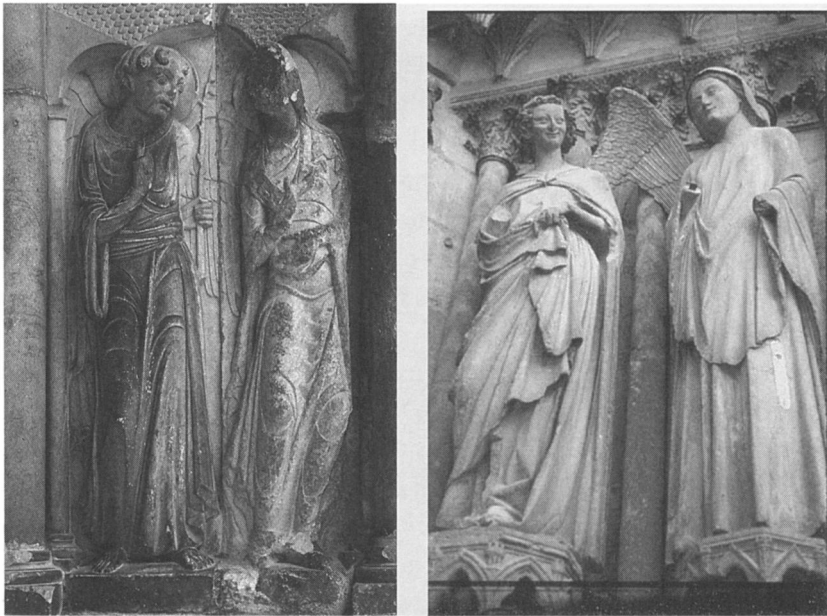


Figure 1a—Moissac Cluniac Abbey Church of Saint Pierre South Porch Portal: Relief—**Annunciation**; **fig. 1b**—Reims Cathedral of Notre Dame—West Façade Central Portal Jamb—Annunciation

in Luke, however, shows that Dante's spare details amount to a pared-down reworking of that text which is clearly indebted to the visual tradition. Indeed, such a comparison shows that the scene's much vaunted fidelity to the Biblical text is an exaggeration, part of what I believe is a general overestimation of the role of textuality throughout the canto.¹⁴ Far from showing Dante's privileging of writing at the expense of images, a careful comparison with Luke's text suggests that our willingness to accept Dante's Annunciation scene as a *reading* of Luke rests on our own familiarity with the condensation of his text in figural representation.

In Luke 1: 28 the Angel greets Mary with the phrase "Ave gratia plena: Dominus tecum. . . ." Mary is neither humble or submissive when she hears this incomprehensible greeting, but "turbata est in sermone eius" (30). Aware of her confusion and discomfort, the angel reassures her: "Ne timeas Maria" (31). He then explains that she will conceive and bear a son. Still perplexed, Mary then asks the angel, "Quomodo fiet istud, quoniam virum non cognosco?" (35). The angel explains the conception using the example of Elizabeth's barrenness. At this point Mary finally responds, "Ecce ancilla domini" (38) and the scene ends.

To claim fidelity to the Biblical text, Dante would need to include some of the intermediate stages of the dialogue between Mary and Gabriel.¹⁵ Dante presents an extended dialogue between Trajan and the widow in the last sculpted scene he describes in the canto and could certainly have done so here, but he chooses not to do so. Instead he condensed the Biblical text, and he did so in exactly the way that it had traditionally been condensed in visual iconography. While some very early illustrations of the Annunciation showed Mary's fear or reluctance, long before the twelfth century the scene had been reduced to the action of a single moment, in just the way Dante depicts it. That transformation was not carried out by commentators on the Biblical text, but by a visual tradition that worked to create an instantly recognizable, one-scene version of this complex story. To achieve that heightened emblematic representation, visual artists collapsed the multi-part Biblical story into a simple dialogue. As they did so, they suppressed Luke's narrative of Mary's fear, uncertainty, incomprehension and misgivings to recreate his scene as one in which Gabriel hails and Mary acquiesces. Like medieval viewers, modern readers are so familiar with this iconic transformation that we willingly accept it as faithful to the text of Luke, though it is not.¹⁶ It is faithful

instead to the iconographic tradition that compressed Luke's narrative into a simple, simultaneous coherent set of actions.

Scene 2: David Dancing before the Ark of the Covenant

The David scene which follows is more complex and its iconography is less familiar. Dante's depiction, however, emphasizes details that are canonical in visual representations of the scene and, as in the case of the Annunciation, Dante reproduces those details of the Biblical narrative that were typically included in a single illustration. In Dante's imagined scene of David dancing before the Ark, a narrative that unfolds over long spans of time and space in the Bible is presented as a single simultaneous action that occurs in a moment of time. Dante's "*carro e' buoi*" (*Purg* 10: 56) reflects 1 Kings 6, where carefully chosen cattle haul the ark. In 2 Kings 6, drivers of the new cart are referred to in verse 3, but verse 12 refers to "the[m] that carried the ark of the Lord." In 2 Kings 6, the text on which the rest of the description is based, these beasts are not mentioned. Oza, who suffers death for daring the "*officio non commesso*," (*Purg* 10: 57), is mentioned in verse 6. The rest of Dante's scene reflects details from verses 12 through 16:

So David went and brought away the ark of God out of the house of Obedeom into the City of David with joy. And there were with David seven choirs and calves for victims.

And when they that carried the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a ram.

And David danced with all his might before the Lord. And David was girded with a linen ephod.

And David and all the house of Israel brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord with joyful shouting, and with the sound of trumpet.

And when the ark of the Lord was come into the city of David, Michol the daughter of Saul, looking out through a window, saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord and she despised him in her heart.¹⁷

While there is no extended dialogue in this scene, as there is in the Annunciation, there is an extended narration of sequential events that are further distinguished by changes of location. Events unfold in a temporal and spatial sequence as the ark slowly moves from the house of Obededom to the "tabernacle, which David had pitched for it" (v. 17). After a mere six paces on the journey, David pauses to offer sacrifice. By verse

16, the procession has entered the City, and David dances before the ark. Michol looks on with contempt in her heart. The ark reaches its final resting place by verse 17. The journey described in these passages reflects longer itineraries of the ark described earlier. In 1 Kings 5–7, the ark, which had been captured by the Philistines, is returned to the Israelites who bring it to Cariathiarim. In the opening verses of 2 Kings 6, it is carried from Cariathiarim to the house of Obbedom.

The Bible describes actions that unfolded over long spans of time and space, but Dante represented them by as if they occurred in a single place and a moment of time. In this presentation he is again following a visual rather than a textual tradition.

This manuscript illumination shows the elements that Dante describes or their equivalents grouped in a single scene. The ark, carried on the shoulders of men rather than in an ox cart, enters from the left. David, who is identified by his crown and harp, dances in front of the ark. David's eyes turn away from the ark toward the upper right where they meet the gaze of Michol, who leans from a window. She points at or gestures toward the King. The seven choirs, much reduced in number, play musical instruments rather than sing as Dante describes. Two servants sacrificing lambs replace the sacred incense Dante the pilgrim can all but smell. Everything happens at once just as Dante describes it. Both *Purgatorio* 10 and this typical illustration represent the activities of the Biblical narrative



Figure 2: Morgan Library ms 638 f. 39v. upper register—David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant

as a set of simultaneous actions rather than a story that unfolds through time and space.¹⁸

Manuscript illustrations of the *Divine Comedy* support the view that Dante's scenes in *Purgatorio* 10 echoed iconographical traditions that illustrators found familiar. The difficulties of illustrating Dante's poem are extreme and notorious:

Se, per esempio, prendiamo un attimo in esame qualcuna delle miniature trecentesche di argomento dantesco, ci accorgiamo che i più bei codici . . . deformano o annullano il contrassegno reale e puntano quasi esclusivamente su effetti parziali d'indole marginale, decorativa e cromatica . . .¹⁹

Approaching this deficiency from a different tack, Peter Brieger notes that such

Variations and divergences were chiefly caused by visual models which were, or seem to have been, pictorial prototypes for the textual image and were more familiar to the illustrators than the text itself.²⁰

In other words, rather than invent new scenes to fit Dante's text, illustrators of the *Commedia* typically bent visual typologies that were familiar to them to the job of illustrating his scenes. In the case of the first two illustrations for *Purgatorio* 10, however, the visual traditions they knew and the scenes Dante described were identical. As Brieger notes:

In representing the examples of humility only the earliest illustrators make any of them look like reliefs carved out of the marble wall. This is done most frequently for the first scene. . . . For the *Annunciation* group the illustrators had only to choose one of the compositions traditional in painting or sculpture. . . . For the David scene the first illustrators must have used an earlier model which successors then copied with little variation.²¹

Illustrators of canto 10 could rely on traditional images of the *Annunciation* and David dancing before the Ark to illustrate the poem. Since Dante had already accommodated his text to a visual tradition, the illustrations here are perhaps uniquely successful in capturing the exact significance of his text.

The illustrators' response to canto 10 offers important corroborating evidence of Dante's reliance on a visual rather than a textual tradition. Their recognition of Dante's scenes reaffirms that his ekphrasis really is

what it professes to be, an authentic opening to the visual tradition. It is not, as current critical opinion would have it, a feint toward the visual made for the purpose of reasserting the superiority of texts. Words here do not conquer images as they are said to do in Vergil and Homer. Dante is trying to do something quite different with ekphrasis from what his predecessors had done.

Scene 3: Trajan and the Widow

Dante's third scene most fully takes the measure of his novel intention. Illustrators of the *Commedia* were confounded by the scene of Trajan and the widow, and as they struggled to illustrate it, they fell back on formulae that had little to do with Dante's description. Brieger notes that "Trajan riding forward accompanied by soldiers, and the eagle standards fluttering above are treated like an episode in a medieval romance."²² Why for this climactic third example did Dante choose a scene that evidently breaks the pattern he established so clearly in the first two? As Dante's illustrators demonstrate, there is no tradition of representing the scene and, more to the point, Dante does not present it in a way to suggest that a single-panel simultaneous visual representation of it could possibly exist. Still, evidence does exist that this scene, like the two before it, is Dante's representation of an existing work of art, though not a work in the Christian tradition. Nancy Vickers has persuasively argued for a visual as well as a textual relationship between Dante's episode and a scene from Trajan's column.

In Vickers' view, this scene or one remarkably like it lies behind Dante's third ekphrasis. She concludes that

The Lives of Gregory and their derivative texts affirm that seeing something in the Forum moved Gregory to save Trajan. That something may have been on Trajan's column, a source of Trajana we know was available to him, but must, in any case, have been a representation of an event in Trajan's history.²⁴

In this cartoon, Trajan is the figure seated on the box-like dais. The so-called widow is the suppliant with upraised hands who kneels in front of the dais. Many other figures also kneel in supplication; soldiers carrying the eagle standards of Trajan's legions stand behind the emperor on both sides. The fact that the suppliant figure is actually a man can, as Vickers notes, be ignored: the gesture is unmistakable, and the position of the scene about halfway up the column—on the eleventh spiral out of

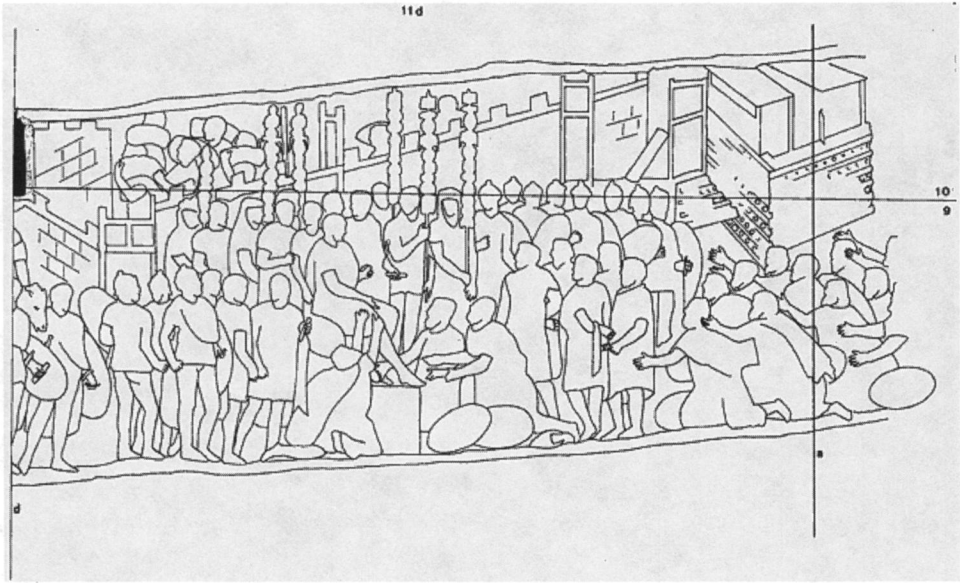


Figure 3: Rome Trajan's Column: Scene 75 spiral 11, scene D. cartoon²³

twenty-four—makes a precise identification of details impossible for a person standing on the ground below.

Viewed from closer up, the bearded suppliant is unmistakably male and the procession of shackled prisoners appears more sinister. Even the “widow’s” gesture seems different. It resembles the many scenes in Greek literature of suppliants who grasp the knees of those from whom they beg favors.

Vickers reads Dante’s text, convincingly, as a response to saints’ lives in which Gregory intercedes to rescue Trajan from Hell. While she documents details of the lives which link the saint’s intercession to something he saw, her main concern is the theological and symbolic role that the scene plays in the poem.²⁵ While that role is undeniably important, I want to take a step back and simply look at the way the Pilgrim evokes St. Gregory as a viewer who looks in a strikingly efficacious way at a work of visual art. My analysis will stress the connection between the way Gregory is reputed to have viewed a work of visual art and the way Dante presents Christian art elsewhere in the canto.

Vickers notes the many versions in medieval legend of the vision that inspired Gregory to act on Trajan’s behalf.²⁶ In those legends, the saint typically comes across some representation in the Forum of Trajan which



Figure 4: Rome Trajan's Column Scene 75—photo

convinces him of the emperor's more than pagan compassion.²⁷ The *Speculum Historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais describes Gregory's intercession and a statue of the emperor which provoked it:

Statua eius in foro traiani in hoc habitu posita est, representans quomodo in expedicione positus, viduam liberavit. Quod beatum gregorium postea movit ad compassionem.

(His statue in the Forum of Trajan is posed in a manner that represents how pausing in his expedition he liberated a widow. This moved the Blessed Gregory afterwards to compassion.)²⁸

In the Whitby *Life* of Gregory, which Vickers quotes at length, Gregory finds through a careful examination of the Forum of Trajan that "Trajan, though a pagan, had done a deed so charitable that it seemed more likely to have been the work of a Christian than of a pagan."²⁹ That work of art is then represented as Dante represents it, that is through the dialogue that took place between the Emperor and the widow.

The Gregory legend records the saint's ability to intuit an extended narrative from a mute work of sculpture. As that scene came to life before

his eyes, or as he gave it life through an inspired misreading, it stirred his compassion and moved him to pray for the long-dead emperor. In Dante's poem, the pilgrim himself sees these scenes and Vickers has persuasively argued that "Dante's text would re-present, would duplicate what Gregory saw."³⁰ Recreating this scene with himself rather than Gregory as protagonist, Dante made a further significant change. Rather than mimic Gregory's transcendent insight, he makes that insight inhere in the work of art itself.

In the earlier two scenes Christian iconography produced emblematic scenes which are attributed to God, but really do not require divine art to give them form and effect. Their transformation of narrative into emblematic pictures was mediated by a long but mundane iconographic tradition. In this third instance, however, God as artist is credited with an ability to present an impossibly extended narrative in an immediately visible form. For readers of Dante's retelling of the scene, however, that protracted and untransformed dialogue remains unpersuasive. We are asked to believe that Dante the pilgrim (mimicking Gregory) sees all at once what his own poem can only spell out sequentially. Dante recognizes the difficulty this paradox poses for readers and acknowledges it in his well known aside rationalizing "visibile parlare:"

Colui che mai non vide cosa nova
produsse esto visibile parlare,
novello a noi perché qui non si trova (*Purg* 10. 94–96)

The discussion of exactly what Dante means by "visibile parlare" and the implication of that turn of phrase for arguments about the relative value he assigns to image and speech is extensive and very well known.³¹ What I want to point out is the coincidence between the way God is described in this *terzina* and the distinction between narrative text and sculpted scene that I believe Dante has emphasized throughout the canto. God "never has seen anything new" because He sees past, present and future all at once in a single simultaneous vision. In other words, God sees as a single image what temporality obliges humans to perceive sequentially and to represent in narrative. God sees an event like the Annunciation not in the way that Luke unfolded it for a human reader, but with beginning, middle and end conflated into a single moment. God sees that event, in other words, as it is portrayed in Dante's fictive relief and

in Christian visual iconography. The same holds true for the scene of David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant. A significant part of the miracle of Gregory's intercession is the saint's ability to imitate this divine vision when he looks at the scene of Trajan and the widow. Through the intermediacy of a sculpted scene, Gregory takes in the story of Trajan's piety in an exemplary, though highly unusual and almost miraculous moment of transcendent vision that for an instant parallels God's way of seeing.

Narrative cannot achieve either this simultaneous presentation or the immediate understanding it sparks. Dante confesses as much in a self-reflexive iconographic feature of the Trajan story which has not been given sufficient attention. In his excellent article on the *fortuna* of the Gregory legend in medieval texts, E. Gordon Whatley describes a link between Dante's Trajan scene and imperial motifs in early *Purgatory*:

In Canto 6 (vv. 88–102) Dante decries the disappearance of the old empire and compares the chaos of the body politic to the untamed vicious career of a riderless horse. “Che val perche ti racconciasse il freno/ Iustianiano se la sella è vota?” (88–89; “What avails it that Justinian should refit the bridle, if the saddle is empty?”) Shortly after this (112–115) Dante refers to Rome as a widow weeping and crying aloud for lack of Caesar's companionship and “pietà.” Both these images recur in *Purgatorio* 10, fused in one scene, when Dante the wayfarer gazes at the glorious figure of Trajan on horseback, with the imperial eagles and Roman cavalry behind him, yielding to justice and “pietà” and to the importuning of the tearful widow who stands at his bridle. Trajan in other words is depicted by the divine artist as the perfect embodiment of the “romanitas,” the imperial order of justice, morality, and peace that is so sadly wanting the poet's own time and that he so much yearns to see renewed.³²

Whatley suggests that Dante has crafted an image in his poem which exemplifies and concretizes in a single emblematic *picture* themes that are dispersed throughout his narrative.³³ This synthesizing emblem of Roman imperial glory suggests that Dante's own narrative aspires to the condition of the picture.

Ekphrasis, Textuality and Dante's “Sin of Pride”

Heffernan's reading of *Purgatorio* 10, however, leads him to the opposite conclusion:

[I]n [Dante's] case . . . ekphrasis not only envoices sculpted figures and thus elicits a story from them; it also doubly demonstrates the power of the word over the

image. . . . In Dante, as in Homer and Virgil, the image is finally mastered by the word.³⁴

My reading suggests, however, that far from using art as a foil against which narrative can show its superiority, Dante highlights the unique strengths of visual art. He extols its ability to transform narrative into a single moment of vision and understanding. He compares that transformation to God's way of seeing all of history at once. His own narrative casts itself as a visual emblem. In all of these ways textuality takes second place behind the visual and does not in any sense assert its mastery. If Dante does not extol his own art, narrative, at the expense of its sister visual art, then perhaps his representation of his own sin of pride in the canto should be understood differently too.³⁵

Dante's exaltation of the visual arts suggests to me that the canto represents an act of subordination of his art to one which he acknowledges here as more God-like. In keeping with the acts of humility which the canto records, I would argue that Dante too expresses humility not as a person but as an artist. Canto 11 dramatizes the self-abnegation of Dante the pilgrim, but canto 10 incorporates the parallel gesture of the poet within the poem. I would also suggest that the transformation of the narrative into the emblematic which Whatley discerned in the image of Trajan and the widow is not an isolated gesture, but an artistic project that will become increasingly important and increasingly apparent as Dante's poem progresses.

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NOTES

1. James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 9.

2. Michael C. J. Putnam, *Virgil's Epic Designs: Ekphrasis in the "Aeneid"* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1998), 1.

3. In asserting that Dante chose to invoke real images here, rather than imaginary scenes as his predecessors did, I am not suggesting that Dante is deficient in imagination or a mere imitator of the visual arts. I am suggesting, however, that for intellectual, artistic and theological purposes, Dante broke with the Vergilian pattern of freely imagining these ekphrastic scenes in order to make a point about visual as opposed to narrative representation and understanding.

4. Quoted in Fortunato Bellonzi, "Arti figurative," *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 5 vols. (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970–1976), 1: 401.

5. Bellonzi, "Arti figurative," 401. See the extensive bibliography on this issue, 403.
6. "Dante e l'esperienza figurativa" reprinted in Ferruccio Ulivi, *La poesia e la mirabile visione Dante e Manzoni* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 2002), 11.
7. No fewer than 1200 Annunciations are catalogued in the *Index of Christian Art* (URL <http://ica.princeton.edu>). The Crucifixion, surely the most important Christian scene, is represented some 1700 times in that database.
8. The Index of Christian Art lists some 15 examples of the scene.
9. Nancy J. Vickers, "Seeing is Believing: Gregory, Trajan, and Dante's Art," *Dante Studies with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, 101 (1983): 67-86. E. Carli, "Dante e l'arte del suo tempo," in *Dante*, edited by Umberto Pasticchi (Rome: De Luca, 1965).
10. Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, translated by Janet Seligman, 2 vols (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 1: 36.
11. Schiller, *Iconography*, 1: 43.
12. In his notes to this canto, Hollander notes the absence of these iconographic elements.
13. Schiller, *Iconography*, 1: 44.
14. "In this case, then, ekphrasis not only envoices sculpted figures and thus elicits a story from them; it also doubly demonstrates the power of the word over the image . . . In Dante, as in Homer and Virgil, the image is finally mastered by the word." (Heffernan, 45). Heffernan also argues (1) that classical ekphrasis *always* asserts the mastery of text over image:

Ekphrasis . . . evokes the power of the silent image even as it subjects that power to the rival authority of language, it is intensely paragonal. Second, the contest it stages is often powerfully gendered: the expression of a duel between male and female gazes, the voice of male speech striving to control a female images that is both alluring and threatening, of male narrative striving to overcome the fixating impact of beauty poised in space. Third, the relation between the arts in an ekphrastic work of literature is not impressionistic . . . it is tangible and manifest, demonstrably declared by the very nature of ekphrastic representation.

15. It should also be emphasized that while Luke is the authoritative source text for the Annunciation, it is not the only *text* on which Dante could have based his scene. The scant details Dante offers might equally well point back to the *Protevangelium of James*, which has a far more extensive and detailed account of the scene of the Annunciation. Dante's textual *references*, in other words, are just as generic as his visual ones.
16. It is faithful to the theology of Luke's account but not his narrative.
17. (2 Kings 12-16; Douay trans.)
18. Juxtaposing this scene with the Annunciation makes very evident a symbolic link between the two which is not at all evident from the Biblical text itself. Mary is humble and submissive, but Michol, who literally looks down on David, is offended and embarrassed by his behavior. (In some Annunciation scenes Gabriel, like David, dances). Her attitude is the opposite of Mary's and the barrenness she suffers is the opposite of Mary's conception.
19. Ulivi, "Dante e l'esperienza figurativa," 12.
20. *Illuminated Manuscripts of the Divine Comedy*, edited by Peter Brieger, Millard Meiss, and Charles S. Singleton, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 1:86.
21. Brieger, Meiss, Singleton, 2: 166.
22. Brieger, Meiss, Singleton, 2:166.
23. The source of the cartoon and the photograph that follows is The McMaster Trajan Project: URL cheiron.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~trajan/buildtrajanpage.cgi?405.
24. Vickers, *Seeing*, 79.
25. In an important article on images throughout the Terrace of Pride, "Dante e le immagini terragne," (reprinted in ferruccio ulivi, *Il visibile parlare* (Caltanissetta-Roma: Sciascia, 1978), 12, Ulivi argues for a double interest on Dante's part in the reliefs of Canto 10:

Chi ben guardi, si accorge che in quelle terzine abbiamo due piani d'interesse: l'uno figurativo, l'altro intellettuale ed esegitico; l'uno d'immagine, l'altro di scrittura con l'annesso esplicarsi didascalico-morale.

He concludes (13) that in *Purg.* 10, “Siamo cioè nell’area del finalismo etico, sia pure con l’idoneo allestimento di tutti gli opportuni ingredienti di una scena.” The reliefs are moralized visions rather than sculptures, in other words, which he compares (13) to “tableaux-vivants,” and dismisses entirely as recreations or evocations of sculpture: “Dante, ripetiamo, con quelle sculture ci ha dato soprattutto dei capolavori di un’altissima spettacolarità che, *per incidens*, è inverata nel marmo.” (14) Like Vickers, Ulivi evidently believes that only by leaving the reliefs behind as art can one move on to a discussion of their meaning. My own view, however, is that the pictorial and the intelligible cohere in the iconography of the first two scenes and are joined again by the deeply intuitive viewing, the in-sight of Gregory that characterizes the third. The discussion of ekphrasis, I believe, necessarily extends into the sphere of exegesis.

26. Vickers, *Seeing*, 75–76.

27. For Latin and Italian texts of these passages, see Vickers, *Seeing*, 83, n.11, and notes 22–24; 84, notes 25–26.

28. Vickers, *Seeing*, 83, n. 24, my translation.

29. Vickers, 71.

30. Vickers, *Seeing*, 70.

31. A compact bibliographical survey is offered by James T. Chiampi, “Visible Speech, Living Stone, and the Names of the Word,” *Rivista di Studi Italiani* 14 (1996): 1–12 (10 n.3).

32. E. Gordon Whatley, “The Uses of Hagiography: The Legend of Pope Gregory and the Emperor Trajan in the Middle Ages,” *Viator* 15 (1984): 45.

33. This is similar to what Vergil does in *Aeneid* 2, when he describes the visually arresting image of Aeneas bearing his father, who in turn holds the household gods on his back while he leads his son by the hand. This is not an ekphrasis in the common sense, but it is an emblematic image that condenses narrative. Representations of this scene were common in Roman art before Vergil.

34. Heffernan, 45. Vickers, 80, agrees:

Gregory’s story demonstrates that within the drama of intercession there may well be a third term: intercessor, intercessee, and that which moves one to intercede—the work of art, the text. That mediating function is one Dante the pilgrim increasingly posits for the text Dante the poet will write: his epic is seen proleptically as meditative in the salvation journey of others. Describing the pagan “text” that moved Gregory thus constitutes a self-reflexive, indeed a self-affirming gesture; it posits the power of texts.

On the basis of the information she provides, however, one might also argue for the intercessory power of the work of visual art.

35. References to the pride of artists in general and to Dante’s own pride in this section of the *Purgatorio* are extensive, and the argument rests on many things beside rivalry between the sister arts. Representation, however, as Teodolinda Barolini has argued, in *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 134, is critical to the argument.

The poet deliberately writes Oderisi’s prideful words and places them at the center of the terrace where they are most apposite but least expected, for the same reason that he makes the question of art and representation central to this terrace alone. For although we find figures of poets elsewhere, and the thematization of poetic concerns, nowhere else does the poet dramatize representation as he does on the terrace of pride. This is because there is no issue that cuts so close to the marrow of his own poetic pride: Dante celebrates himself as the poetic correlative of Giotto, an artist who was celebrated for aspiring to total verisimilitude, because he knows . . . what is at stake in his imitation of the divine mimesis . . .

Heffernan, 42–43, weighs in on this issue, too: “To make it speak is in one sense to presume to rival God’s art, to replace the divinely made image with the poet’s own words.” I argue that the canto parallels God’s art and visual art and sets both above narrative.

Veronica: Dante's Pilgrimage from Image to Vision

ALESSANDRO VETTORI

Il tempo del pellegrinaggio è la presente età,
nella quale siamo sempre pellegrini in battaglia.
Jacopo da Varagine, *Legenda aurea*

[C]ome gente che pensa a suo cammino,
che va col cuore e col corpo dimora. (*Purg.* 2:11–12)

The image of the Veronica occurs only twice in Dante's *opus*. In both instances his reference to the miraculous portrait of Christ anticipates a climactic visionary experience. It also thematizes the topos of pilgrimage, while pointing indirectly to the recurrent Dantean notion of exile.

When approaching the end of his *libello* in Chapter 40 of the *Vita nova*, unexpectedly and with little preamble, Dante mentions the Veronica, the much worshiped portrayal of Christ's sacred face preserved in Rome.¹ The "image benedetta," "the blessed image," is notionally the object of a long digression, but the passage in fact revolves around the pilgrims heading to see it, who imperceptibly become the main focus of the account.² Dante specifically remarks on the pilgrims' melancholy: "li quali peregrini andavano, secondo che mi parve, molto pensosi," ("[t]hese pilgrims, it seemed to me, were going along very pensive").³ Their brooding state relates to Dante's own despondency and sadness. Speaking in the self-centered mode of a grieving lover, Dante connects the pilgrims' displeasure to the suffering he himself is experiencing due to Beatrice's death. The pilgrims, of course, know nothing of Beatrice: the association of their

pain with Dante's comes under the aegis of absence. They are saddened by their distance from home and from their beloved friends: "pensano de li loro amici lontani" ("they are thinking of their friends far away").⁴ When describing them, Dante stresses the twinned concepts of thought and absence; the pilgrims, "moving pensively along," are thinking "perhaps of things that are not there."⁵ Meanwhile, the city they pass through is grieving because it has lost the source of its blessing, Beatrice. Grief pervades the city and the pilgrims, thereby creating a metaphorical correspondence between exteriority and interiority, between place and soul. Given their present state of mind, if the pilgrims were told of Beatrice's death, they would weep in sympathy for Dante.

In *Paradiso* 31, in a teleological atmosphere comparable to that of *Vita nova* 40, Dante mentions the Veronica relic again. When approaching the vision of God, which will be described in *Paradiso* 33, the poet introduces visionary rhetoric by mentioning the famous image of Christ's face. This reference to the Veronica occurs at a crucial moment. Beatrice has just abandoned Dante, and Bernard of Clairvaux has unexpectedly assumed the role of guiding him during the last, important stages of his journey.⁶ Dante-poet compares himself, when traveling through the afterworld, to a pilgrim who has finally arrived in Rome from a remote region in order to worship the Veronica; when the pilgrim reaches his destination, he is overjoyed to contemplate what he has so long hungered to see:⁷

Qual è colui che forse di Croazia
viene a veder la Veronica nostra,
che per l'antica fame non sen sazia,
ma dice nel pensier, fin che si mostra:
'Signor mio Iesù Cristo, Dio verace,
or fu sì fatta la sembianza vostra?';
Tal era io mirando la vivace
carità di colui che 'n questo mondo,
contemplando, gustò di questa pace. (*Par.* 31:103–111)

[. Just as one
who, from Croatia perhaps, has come
to visit our Veronica—one whose
old hunger is not sated, who, as long
as it is shown, repeats these words in thought:
"O my Lord Jesus Christ, true God, was then
Your image like the image I see now?"—

such was I as I watched the living love
of him who, in this world, in contemplation,
tasted that peace.].⁸

The Croatian pilgrim symbolizes surprised admiration. Given Dante's geographic parameters, the pilgrim has endured an almost endless journey from Croatia. Now he stares at the sacred image and his desire to contemplate it cannot be satiated.⁹ Even as he looks at it, he wonders whether this is indeed the true appearance of the Man-God.¹⁰ The prolonged expectation and the vicissitudes undertaken to admire it motivate his present disbelief.

Dante's simile establishes a polymorphous specular dynamic. It associates the Croatian pilgrim's experience of adoration with Dante's own incredulous feeling. Dante stares at Bernard, the mystic about whom he has so often thought, just as the Croatian pilgrim stares at the Veronica. The poet stands in relation to Bernard's soul as the pilgrim stands in relation to Christ's image. Through this simile Dante emphasizes Bernard's symbolic significance as contemplation, as well as Bernard's ability to evoke the image of Christ. It is through contemplation that Bernard gained vicinity to God, and therefore he can now lead Dante along the same path.

In a double dynamic of reflection, Dante's stare mimics the prayerful gaze of Bernard, who looks to heaven. The specularity of this double staring act is stressed by the text itself, in which Dante's gaze at Bernard is paralleled by Bernard's gaze at God. Visionary rhetoric continues in the next two tercets, in which Bernard invites Dante to lift his eyes from the base of the mystical rose and contemplate the Virgin Mary.¹¹ In this way Bernard fulfills multiple roles, since for Dante he represents mystical union, but also Marian devotion, due to having been the reformer of the Cistercian Order as well as the author of numerous works in praise of the Virgin Mary.¹²

The complex series of transpositions at work in these lines anticipates the vision of God at the end of the third *cantica*. Dante is mesmerized by Bernard and looks at him with the same surprise and awe with which pilgrims look at the Roman Veronica. Bernard, however, will lead Dante not to the *vera icon*, a representation of Christ impressed on a cloth, but to the "real vision." Bernard's invitation to look beyond the lower base of

the rose stresses his role as Dante's guide. In conformity with his theological treatise on the role of Mary, Bernard urges Dante to admire and contemplate the Virgin. On Bernard's plea, expressed in the famous song to Mary of *Paradiso* 33 (1–39), Mary will, in her turn, grant Dante the vision of the Trinity.

The power of vision that dominates this section of the *Divine Comedy* is introduced through reference to the Veronica. Contrary to most medieval relics, which inspired veneration due to their previous association with Jesus, Mary, or the saints, the function of the Veronica centers on gaze. Common relics claim their sacredness from a past relation or physical contact with sanctity (either in the form of a body, parts of a body, or an object that has been in contact with a saintly body). The Veronica's holiness derives not only from having touched the body of Jesus, but also from the way in which it reproduces his facial features.¹³ Its specular quality makes it unique among relics. While devout persons living in the later Middle Ages may have personally possessed, or claimed to possess, the nails of the true cross or a piece of Mary's cloak (acquired at a prohibitive price in the racketeering relic market of the time), the Veronica cloth was publicly displayed in St. Peter's in Rome for the benefit of all Christians. It alone claimed reproduction of the true image of Christ as he appeared in human form. As such, it was the object of continued worship throughout the Middle Ages, and pilgrims came to admire it from all parts of Christendom. In his *Speculum ecclesiae*, Giraldus Cambrensis confirms the widespread fame of this relic.¹⁴ During Dante's life, pilgrims traveled to Rome to see the Veronica in greater numbers than those traveling to pay respect to the Holy See.¹⁵ The Veronica relic enjoyed overwhelming popularity and the pilgrim's ambition to make the trip was aggressively reinforced by the granting of indulgences. Those who traveled from overseas to see the Veronica qualified for twelve thousand years of remission and the Romans themselves were granted three thousand. The Veronica pilgrimage held the top position as a means to obtain indulgences in the *Liber indulgentiarum*.¹⁶

A thick cloud of mysterious and legendary intricacies surrounds the history of the famous relic.¹⁷ The Roman Veronica was first authenticated by Pope Innocent III in 1216, when it was officially acknowledged that it contained the impression of Jesus' face. It then disappeared at the time of the sack of Rome in 1527.¹⁸ During the three hundred years of its presence in Rome, the Veronica became the foremost icon of Christian

culture. The fourteenth-century historian Giovanni Villani notes that it was displayed every Friday and on special festivities.¹⁹ Among the most notable poets to have dedicated verses to it are Francesco Petrarca, William Langland, and Geoffrey Chaucer. Petrarca's sonnet "Movesi il vecchierel canuto et bianco" insists on the specular, representational power of the Veronica, but also highlights the importance of pilgrimage and the laborious effort undertaken by an old man to come to Rome: he abandons his family and his familiar environment to risk a long, exhausting trip despite his age and frail health.²⁰ Petrarca fashions the old man's journey to see the Veronica into a parallel of life's movement toward the vision of Christ beyond physical life.²¹ Langland's passage in *Piers the Plowman* describes in great detail a pilgrim in "Saracen dress," who displays the extent of his travels by wearing on his hat and cloak the symbols of the shrines he has visited: "souvenirs from Sinaï, shells from Galicia / on his cloak crosses and the keys of Rome, / a Veronica trinket."²² This enumeration is similar to Dante's list of pilgrims identified by the icon they bear on their clothes. In *Vita nova* 40 Dante explains that *palmer*s "journey across the sea to that Holy Land"; *pilgrims* "journey to the house of Galicia"; and finally *romers* "travel to Rome."²³ Elements indicative of the distances traveled to see the Veronica also pervade Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale."²⁴ While on his way to Canterbury to pay a visit to the renowned shrine, the Pardoner wears a small Veronica emblem on his cap to symbolize that he had previously made a trip to Rome: "[a] vernicle hadde he sowèd on his cappe."²⁵ The status of pilgrim (being one at present or having been one in the past) was memorialized in one's attire, and the Veronica thus became an icon to be worn on one's own clothing and admired by others.

The Roman Veronica is the most famous of numerous portraits of Christ known as "vernicles," in Latin *veronicae*. These portraits are attributed an Eastern origin because they are painted on cloth, and Byzantine culture displayed a marked predilection for canvas painting rather than wood painting, frescoing or sculpting.²⁶ When canvas paintings represented Christ, they were known as vernicles. Vernicles were thought to have miraculous powers by virtue of portraying Christ's *vera icon*, his "true image." Since they contained Christ's sacred image, in the eyes of the faithful beholder these icons could not be the product of human representative art. Human beings possessed neither the power nor the ability to portray God. The icons were considered God's own creation; they were not paintings, but *acheiropoietai*, the Greek term designating "objects not

made by human hands.”²⁷ The implication behind this reasoning was that they were the product of God’s own creation; as the represented subject was divine, so must be the maker. Thus vernicles were regarded as God’s own artifact. More than portrayals of his features on cloth, they were his specular image. As such, they were non-representational and almost comparable to nature itself.²⁸ The Roman Veronica stood out among the rest due to having been declared by the papacy as the only vernicle that had borne direct contact with Christ’s face; it was considered to have preserved traits of Jesus’ body (similarly to the Shroud of Turin) and was therefore regarded as more miraculous and worthy of veneration.

The account of how the Veronica became the object of popular worship follows convoluted paths in historical records. The only common denominator of the many different sources is their apocryphal nature. There is no scriptural basis for the Veronica story, which is characterized by an intricate cluster of superimposed displacements and transpositions. Names and facts are extracted from one another in random juxtapositions, false etymologies, biased scriptural interpretations, and legendary narratives which, with the typically medieval lack of discrimination between mythical narration and factual record, pass for historical fact. The Veronica account concerns many disciplines and may be viewed from a variety of perspectives: from Church history to devotion, art history, folklore, hagiography, literature, theology, and anthropology. The most surprising aspect of the Veronica cloth is its inclusion in official devotional acts such as the Stations of the Cross.²⁹

The history as transmitted by late medieval tradition recounts that a woman named Veronica encountered Jesus as he walked to the top of Mount Calvary to be crucified. Feeling pity for his desperate condition, she handed him a handkerchief to wipe blood and sweat from his face. Miraculously, the image of his face remained impressed on her piece of cloth, which from then on was regarded as the *vera icon*, the “true image” of Christ. According to this account, the Veronica is not a painted portrait; it is a specular reflection. Facial structure and traits were not sketched by an artist; they inexplicably surfaced and became permanently stamped on the piece of cloth at the touch of Christ’s face.

The episode appears in apocryphal texts only and, in order to convey to it the authority granted by canonicity, the account was interwoven with the gospel story of the Hemorrhissa, the anonymous woman cured of her twelve-year-long emission of blood at the simple touch of Christ’s

mantle.³⁰ The association of the two episodes derives from symmetry in their thematic and symbolic typologies. They are both concerned with bodily fluids and the comforting of physical ailments. The cessation of hemorrhagic bleeding, when the woman comes into physical contact with Jesus' robe, is paralleled by the less mysterious cleansing of Jesus' scourged face. Two similar narratives become combined when the Hemorrhissa is associated with Veronica. The cured woman reciprocates the favor and alleviates the suffering of the man who had previously restored her health. As he touched her with cloth, she does the same to him. In both cases a miracle transpires.³¹

The summary just given is the result of a convoluted assemblage of elements over a long span of time. Before she was associated with the woman who offers Jesus a handkerchief, the anonymous Hemorrhissa was herself the subject of frequent representations in early Christian art.³² Eusebius of Caesarea identifies the Hemorrhissa as a native of Caesarea Philippi and connects the gospel story to a sculpture placed before a woman's house.³³ The bronze statues of two human figures, a man and a woman, faced each other; from their expressions it appeared that the woman was making a request and the man was granting it. Eusebius claims that the two statues reproduce the gospel scene of the Hemorrhissa, but he does not mention the Veronica story. The Byzantine historian and rhetorician John of Antioch reports the same story with similar details about a woman named Berenice, the Greek name from which the Latin Veronica derives.³⁴ The first text to identify the Hemorrhissa with the name Veronica is the *Memoriae Nicodemi*, also known as *Acta Pilati*, a fourth-century account of Jesus' trial. According to this source, the Hemorrhissa was a witness at the trial and her name was Berenice, the Macedonian version of the Greek name Pherenike. In the subsequent *Mors Pilati* (also known as *Cura sanitatis Tiberii*), likely a crucial source for later versions of the legend, the Hemorrhissa is said to have been the same woman who was granted possession of the miraculous cloth image. Berenice may have been chosen because the etymology of her name fits the role of the woman in question. "Pherenike" signifies "the bringer of victory," an apt name for a person who bears Christ's true image. When the name identifying the woman in question becomes metonymically the name of the veil she owned, the Latin version of the name Pherenike, Veronica, results in the false etymology of the *vera icon*, the "true image," according to the typically medieval motto that states *nomen est omen*.³⁵ Considering the

convoluted legends leading to the creation of this myth, determining whether the name or the object originated first is left to speculation.

The *Mors Pilati* narrates that the Emperor Tiberius was suffering from an incurable disease (possibly leprosy) and, having heard of a physician who healed miraculously by word alone, sent his messenger Volusian to fetch him. But Pilate had already put Jesus to death and so Volusian brought back Jesus' portrait on a piece of cloth, given to him by a woman named Veronica. The Emperor was cured simply by looking at the image on the cloth, and he then converted to Christianity. A good deal of this material was appropriated from the *Doctrine of Addai*, which reports the same facts, but relates them to King Abgar of Edessa instead of the Emperor Tiberius, and names the prodigious handkerchief "mandylion." Thus in one manifestation, the Roman Veronica was a late reproduction of the ancient "mandylion of Edessa."³⁶

So far, no source has tied the woman named Veronica to Christ's Passion. In the middle of the thirteenth century, Jacopo da Varagine loosely relates the Veronica episode to Christ's death, but specifies that their meeting took place well before Jesus ascended Mount Calvary. In his *Legenda aurea* Jacopo reports the story about the Emperor Tiberius as already told in *Mors Pilati*. In this version, Veronica explains to Volusian the origin of her cloth image:

When the Teacher was going about preaching and I, to my regret, could not be with him, I wanted to have his picture painted so that when I was deprived of his presence, I could at least have the solace of his image. So one day I was carrying a piece of linen to the painter when I met Jesus, and he asked me where I was going. I told him what my errand was. He asked for the cloth I had in my hand, pressed it to his venerable face, and left his image on it. If your master looks devoutly upon this image, he will at once be rewarded by being cured.³⁷

Veronica decides to bring the Emperor the miraculous cloth herself, "and the moment he looked at it, he won back his pristine health."³⁸

Jacopo da Varagine's version places considerable emphasis on the role of replacement acquired by the image, since it emphasizes the Veronica as a substitute for Christ himself. The cloth takes the place of the person it portrays and possesses the same miraculous functions and healing powers he himself possessed when alive. As with any other relic, power is conferred to the Veronica cloth through the dynamic of transference. Veronica clarifies that she wanted the portrait in order to have a token of

Christ's presence in his absence; when his definitive bodily absence occurs in the form of death, she shares the healing power of the image with others. From here, the step to a direct connection with Mount Calvary is a short one. The next development in this medieval legend will place a woman named Veronica on Christ's way to the crucifixion.

Thirteenth-century mysticism is responsible for that connection. Jacopo da Varagine's *Legenda aurea*, which indirectly linked Veronica to Calvary, dates from approximately 1260. According to Gertrude Schiller, it was Roger Argenteuil who varied the legend by superimposing the sixth-century account of St. Veronica to the gospel story of the ascent to Mount Calvary.³⁹ Paul Perdrizet argues that this development reflects the increased emphasis that the Franciscan Order placed on Christ's Passion.⁴⁰ The development of liturgical and paraliturgical performances in the late Middle Ages may also have contributed to the association of the Veronica story with the Passion.⁴¹

Notwithstanding the reasons that brought about this confluence, the crucial fact remains that the Veronica story was made part of the *via crucis* in the course of the thirteenth century. This indicates that the association was a new devotional and cultural acquisition during the time of Dante. Around the year 1300, the Veronica was believed to reflect the Jesus of the Passion, an image that would have originated when the cloth was used to wipe sweat and blood off his scourged face.⁴² This was the "true" face of the Savior—doubly true because it portrayed him at the moment of the crucifixion, the highest point of his saving mission on earth. The trope that comes to mind in connection with the Veronica cloth is catachresis, a figure of speech that substitutes for an absence.⁴³ An invisible God may be perceived in his human features sketched on the cloth. As relic, the Veronica cloth is a replacement. As reflection of Christ's face, the Veronica serves as anticipation of the "true" vision to be expected after death.⁴⁴

Dante's references to the well-known Veronica relic remain at the level of brief evocations that required no further explanation for a contemporary reader. The poet does not belabor the point, nor does he write an ekphrasis in either case. Yet, given the contexts in which the two references to the Veronica veil occur in Dante's work, suffering constitutes a *mise-en-abîme*. The suffering Christ, recently linked to the Veronica in Dante's time, reflects the situations evoked in Dante's texts. The two

passages in which Dante mentions the Veronica imply a desire to experience a higher vision, while they explicitly include the hardship and discomfort undertaken to obtain that vision.⁴⁵ The proleptic nature of the two references is clear when Dante describes the “mirabile visione” in Chapter 42 of the *Vita nova* and also when he attempts to overcome the ineffable quality of the Trinity in *Paradiso* 33. Mentioning the Veronica announces the visions to come, whether the object of the vision be Beatrice or the Trinity. The precarious reflection of Christ’s face on a piece of cloth is the material token of a more ethereal visionary experience to follow.

The Veronica flanks the “journey to Beatrice” from *Vita nova* to *Paradiso*.⁴⁶ As in *Vita nova* 40, when the physical presence of Beatrice has recently abandoned Dante, in *Paradiso* 31 the glorified Beatrice has just relinquished her role as guide. In both texts, the final vision is announced textually by a proleptic atmosphere of anticipation established by the reflection of Christ’s face on the Veronica cloth. The Veronica leads to the “mirabile visione” at the end of the *libello*, when Dante unveils his intent to glorify and honor Beatrice’s memory, and it marks his journey through the afterlife at the end of *Paradiso*, when Beatrice disappears. Thus the Veronica relic, which bears the name of a woman and yet metonymically refers to the face of the Man-God, marks the beginning of Dante’s journey and the end of it—if such beginning is broadly defined and the “mirabile visione” of the *Vita nova* is understood as the author’s announcement of his intention to write the *Divine Comedy*.⁴⁷ The gender-ambiguous metonymy that structures the Veronica relic matches the equally double-gendered superimposition of Beatrice and Christ. The Veronica image announces not only the “mirabile visione” of Beatrice, but also the vision of God at the end of *Paradiso*. The pilgrimage Dante plans in *Vita nova* 42, when he sees the glorified Beatrice, has its conclusion in *Paradiso* 33, when the pilgrim stands in front of a more sublime and inexpressible vision.

Both passages mentioning the Veronica veil specifically refer to the pilgrimage necessary to enjoy that vision. Dante focuses on the itinerary leading to the Veronica, rather than on the icon itself, just as he does on the larger scope of his journey through the afterworld, in relation to his final vision of the Trinity. In *Vita nova* 40 the pilgrims are caught in a transitional state as they wander through Florence while traveling south to Rome. Transitoriness permeates the text, both in a literal, thematic

sense and *e contrario*, by referring to their temporary stop in the city. Transition and movement, united with the language of vision, are insisted upon in the rhetoric that introduces “Deh peregrini” and also in the sonnet itself. Dante notes that this is “quel tempo che molta gente *va per vedere* quella *immagine* benedetta . . . la quale *vede* la mia donna gloriosamente” (“that season when many people *go to see* the blessed *image* . . . which my lady *beholds* in glory”); and “alquanti peregrini *passavano* per una via” (“some pilgrims *were going down* a street”); “li quali peregrini *andavano* . . . molto pensosi” (“[t]hese pilgrims . . . *were going along* very pensive”). Dante thinks to himself that he would make them weep “anzi ch’elli *uscissero* di questa cittade” (“before *they left* this city”); and then, “*passati* costoro da la [sua] *veduta*,” (“after these people *had passed* from [his] *sight*”), he composes the sonnet “Deh peregrini che pensosi *andate*” (“Ah *pilgrims, moving* pensively *along*”). The pilgrims’ transitive status is once again invoked when Dante wonders what would happen if he stopped them: “[s]e io li potessi *tenere* alquanto” (“[i]f I could *detain* them awhile”).⁴⁸

The simile in *Paradiso* 31 compares Dante to a Croatian pilgrim who, having finally reached his much-desired destination, cannot take his eyes off the image he has traveled so long and far to admire. While at this point readers would presumably expect the text to insist on the stasis of contemplation, the lexicon of this passage and of the lines surrounding it continues to stress motion. The cultural concept informing these lines indicates that pilgrimage itself is a prayerful, edifying, and sanctifying experience.⁴⁹ In the contemplative atmosphere of *Paradiso* 31, Dante employs emphasis on traveling, motion, and movement. When Dante’s gaze remains fixed on Bernard, whom the poet considers a desirable goal for his vision, Bernard commands the pilgrim to lift his eyes to Mary, for his final destination has not been reached:

E ’l santo sene: “Acciò che tu assommi
perfettamente,” disse, “il tuo cammino,
a che priego e amor santo mandommi,
vola con li occhi per questo giardino;
ché veder lui t’acconcerà lo sguardo
piú a montar per lo raggio divino . . . (Par. 31:94–99)

[And he, the holy elder, said: “That you
may consummate your journey perfectly—

for this, both prayer and holy love have sent me
to help you—let your sight fly round this garden;
by gazing so, your vision will be made
more ready to ascend through God's own ray . . .”]

After referring directly to Dante's journey (“il tuo cammino”), and to the movement by which he came to meet Dante (“prieo e amor santo mandommi”), Bernard instructs the poet's eyes “to fly” around the garden, and further his “ascension” toward God. The *stabilitas loci* leaves ample space for contemplation as *peregrinatio animae*; the physical movement inherent to pilgrimage becomes a metaphor for the upward movement of the soul.⁵⁰ In the epilogue of *Paradiso* 31, when Dante stares at Mary's glory, the emphasis remains on the importance of movement as a prerequisite to obtain the desired vision. Dante utilizes numerous terms connected to motion and travel: “Io *levai* li occhi” (“I *lifted* up my eyes”), 118; “dove 'l sol *declina*” (“where the sun *sets*”), 120; “quasi di valle *andando* a monte” (“*climbing* with my eyes from valley / to summit”), 121; “il temo / che *mal guidò* Fetonte” (“the shaft that Phaeton had *misguided*”), 125. The poet achieves a slower narrative pace in this section of *Paradiso*, when the moment of divine vision is approaching; yet he does not forsake movement. When the pilgrim fixes his gaze on Bernard, he is redirected to Mary, who in her turn will guide him to a final vision of God. The close alternation of kinesis and stasis, motion and vision, pilgrimage and contemplation signals the imminent termination of Dante's journey.

Movement in relation to vision also permeates the Veronica story. In the most archaic version, the woman named Veronica meets Jesus while he is traveling to have his portrait painted. In the thirteenth-century version, she stops to wipe his face while he is ascending Mount Calvary. In both, an unexpected stop or change of course results in a miraculous portrayal of the person encountered, so that visionary experience and travel become an indissoluble unit.

In Dante's texts, the digressive nature of the Veronica insertion (either in the form of a long anecdote in the *Vita nova* or in the form of a simile in *Paradiso*) can be regarded as a narrative journey off the main track of the plot. In *Vita nova* 40 the additional specification of three different types of pilgrims bearing different names (palmer, romer, and pilgrim) according to their destination (Jerusalem, Rome, Santiago de Compostela) constitutes a second-degree digression and an intensification of the

theme of pilgrimage. Similarly, the simile of *Paradiso* 31 constitutes a detour from the main narrative, which remains temporarily suspended while the poet unravels the issue of travel and vision.

Besides being concerned with movement, chapter 40 of the *Vita nova* insists on the hardship of traveling. The romers endure perilous situations before they reach their destination. The will-power driving the pilgrims through the trials of a dangerous journey demonstrates their tenacious devotion and profound faith, but it does not diminish the pain and discomfort caused by being *en route*. The section of the *Vita nova* dedicated to the journey brings the theme of suffering to the fore. To Dante's observant gaze, the pilgrims initially look merely "pensive." The city they are passing through is "mournful" for the death of Beatrice. Dante himself is distressed. Dante-poet then finds a way to relate the pilgrims' pain to the city's sadness and to his own grief, and he points out the connection to the reader. He pretends that his dialogue with the pilgrims actually occurred and that they wept when he revealed to them that Beatrice, whom he addresses as the "city's source of blessing," has passed away.

The rhetoric of travel and vision continues in the sonnet "Oltre la spera," in which kinetic energy is transposed onto the spirit moving from the poet's heart to the place where he can admire the beloved "beyond the widest sphere." The itinerant pattern of the pilgrims traveling to worship the sacred image in "Deh peregrini" becomes an internalized movement of the spirit in "Oltre la spera," in which the "peregrino spirito" ("pilgrim spirit") migrates to see Dante's beloved. As Dante explains in his "divisione" of this sonnet, pilgrimage and vision permeated his mind when he conceived the poem:

Lo sonetto, lo quale io feci allora, comincia: *Oltre la spera*; lo quale ha in sé cinque parti. Ne la prima dico *là ove va* lo mio pensiero, nominandolo per lo nome d'alcuno suo effetto. Ne la seconda dico per che *va là suso*, ciò è chi fa così *andare*. Ne la terza dico *quello che vide*, ciò è una donna onorata là suso: e chiamolo allora "*spirito peregrino*," acciò che spiritualmente *va là suso* e sí come *peregrino*, lo quale è *fuori della sua patria*. Ne la quarta dico come elli la *vede* tale, ciò è in tal qualitate che io nol posso intendere, ciò è a dire che 'l mio pensiero *sale* ne la qualità di costei in grado che 'l mio intelletto nol puote comprendere . . . Ne la quinta dico che, avvegna che io non possa intendere *là ove lo pensiero mi trae*.

[The sonnet I just wrote begins, *Beyond the sphere*, and contains five parts. In the first I tell where my thought *is going*, naming it by the name of one of its effects. In the second I tell why *it goes up there*, that is, *what makes it go* like that. In the

third I tell that which *I saw*, that is a lady honored up there, and I call it “*pilgrim spirit*” because *it goes up there* spiritually and remains there like a pilgrim *far from home*. In the fourth I tell how *it beholds* her such, that is of such a nature, as I cannot understand it; that is to say that my thought *ascends into* the nature of this lady to such a degree as my mind cannot grasp . . . In the fifth part I say that even though I cannot realize the place *to which my thought takes me*.]⁵¹

Through pain and weeping, the “pilgrim spirit” reaches the beatific vision of Beatrice, which is as ineffable as the vision of God in *Paradiso* 33. When that “pilgrim spirit” returns, Dante is incapable of understanding his account; he only understands that the subject of it is Beatrice:

Vedela tal, che quando 'l mi ridice,
Io no lo intendo, sí parla sottile
Al cor dolente che lo fa parlare.
So io che parla di quella gentile,
Però che spesso ricorda Beatrice,
Sí ch'io lo 'ntendo ben, donne mie care.

[It sees her so, that when it tells me this
I cannot understand its subtle tale
Spoken to the sad heart that makes it speak.
I know it talks of that most gracious one,
Because it often mentions Beatrice;
This much, dear ladies, I well understand.]⁵²

Thus the pilgrims traveling through Florence provided the occasion that inspired the spirit's vision in “*Oltre la spera*,” which will eventually lead to the “*mirabile visione*.” The two concluding sonnets of the *Vita nova* depict varying experiences connected to pilgrimage. “*Deh peregrini*” meditates on the nostalgia of pilgrimage, the suffering of travel, and the tragedy of death; it thematizes the absence of the beloved in the broadest sense. “*Oltre la spera*” expresses the incomprehensible experience of her presence achieved by migration of the spirit.

Dante's reference to the Veronica relic is not, then, a superfluous digression. The evoked pilgrimage reenacts the *via crucis*, and “*Deh peregrini*” may also be read as having Christ as its main referent *en lieu* of Beatrice. The strong biblical echoes of the poem, whose theological source has been identified as the Lamentations of Jeremiah, make the Christological superimposition plausible. The *via crucis* becomes a metaphor of life as pilgrimage from a precarious physical condition to the

fulfillment of eternal happiness. The figure of speech adopted is that of romers, the pilgrims who left their home to visit the Veronica and now suffer the pain of travel. Rather than focusing on their goal, they hark back to the familiarity of the things they left behind. Their unstable situation as pilgrims makes them desire the safe and sedentary condition of those who remained at home. The intermediary stage in which they find themselves resembles the condition of exodus or, in a symbolic formulation, life itself.

If Dante employed the Veronica icon to symbolize a pilgrimage or journey, the idea of the Veronica as portrait conceptualizes the distance between image and object in artistic representation. As an image that is also a relic, the *vera icon* allows the absent subject portrayed to become present.⁵³ At the same time, it paradoxically intensifies the feeling of the subject's absence. Thus the specular quality of the Veronica cloth at once evokes the pain of the crucifixion and reiterates the physical absence of the crucified Jesus. The pilgrim's painful distance from home and family parallels the absence of the crucified Jesus, which the *vera icon* makes present in a figurative fashion.

From a narratological point of view, the *vera icon* in Dante's work is a rhetorical device, a mirroring image of the narrative it interrupts, or a *mise-en-abîme*. It represents a specular reflection of what is to come in Dante's account. It is a proleptic announcement of the "mirabile visione" and a cryptic hint of the ineffable vision of the Trinity portrayed in the *Paradiso*. The *Comedy* itself may be interpreted as an anagogical pilgrimage of the soul from sinfulness to purification. The extremes of that journey could be represented *lato sensu* by Dante's two mentions of the Veronica, the first as announcement of the pilgrimage, the second as announcement of its conclusion.⁵⁴

Pilgrimage permeates the narrative of the *Divine Comedy* as a reflection of Dante's exile while he was writing it. The status of pilgrims resembles that of exiles. Pilgrims have inflicted their wanderings upon themselves for spiritual reasons; exiles have suffered expulsion from their homeland for political, ideological, economic, or legal reasons. Pilgrimage, as exile, suspends ordinary life and forces the pilgrim to experience the transitoriness of human condition, transforming him into an *homo viator*.⁵⁵ Life itself is considered a pilgrimage on earth, the process of returning home to the peace and happiness of the afterlife.⁵⁶ In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the

fall from earthly Paradise caused the loss of divine resemblance in mankind. Thereafter, human beings have attempted to reconstruct that lost image of divinity through a complex apparatus of religious practices. For Christians, the Veronica miraculously reproduces that divine image.⁵⁷ Pilgrims journey to see the specular image of Christ in the hope that they will eventually see God's real image in eternity. Pilgrimage itself metaphorically parallels the journey of human life. The pilgrims' condition resembles the condition of Adam and Eve. The pilgrims' clothes and the etymology of the noun "pilgrim" have been assimilated to the myth of the Garden of Eden. Pilgrims traditionally wear leather, as Adam and Eve wore the leather garments God made for them.⁵⁸ Thus the status of pilgrims becomes an archetype for the condition of mankind, a primeval status reflected even in the impenetrable folds of etymological connections—veracious or false as they might be:

Peregrinus in the vernacular languages became "*pellegrinus*, *pèlerin*, *pilgrim*," both in accordance with linguistic rules and also because of its association with "*pelle*" or skin. In the Middle Ages these words meant not only "*homo viator*", "traveler", "stranger" or "exile", but also "one who goes about clad in skins", or naked.⁵⁹

Metaphorically then, pilgrims are those who have been routed from their original home, or place of happiness. "*Pelle-grini*" contains the term for leather, or skin. By connecting the biblical myth of the Garden of Eden with life as earthly pilgrimage, the journey to the Veronica relic acquires a deeper significance and becomes a representation of life itself.

Dante's insistence on the pilgrims' sadness in the *Vita nova* and on his own ecstatic fulfillment at accomplishing his goal in *Paradiso* suggests a figurative reading of these passages as the poet's understanding of exile. I am not proposing a solution to the philological impasse at the conclusion to the *Vita nova* by suggesting that Dante is hinting (*ante factum* or *post factum*) yet again at his own political exile. Emphasis on suffering caused by the poet's own exile invites a reading of the *Commedia* as *opus exilii*, a poem of and about exile. The frequent "prophecies" of Dante's own exile uttered by Ciacco, Farinata, Brunetto, Vanni Fucci, Corrado Malaspina, Oderisi, and Cacciaguida reiterate the connection between what the poet is experiencing and the journey through the afterlife he is narrating. Cacciaguida formulates the most moving prediction, referring specifically to the acute pain caused by the absence of beloved things while in exile:

Tu lascerai ogne cosa diletta
più caramente; e questo è quello strale
che l'arco de lo essilio pria saetta. (*Par.* 17:54–57)

[You shall leave everything you love most dearly:
this is the arrow that the bow of exile
shoots first . . .]

Thus Dante's own exile is the one concept inspiring the "pilgrimage" through hell, purgatory, and paradise. In Dante pilgrimage as exile is a comprehensive pattern of thought, featuring a broad existential scope that encompasses political exile, but also including ontological and spiritual dimensions.⁶⁰ Dante's emphasis on his own political exile from Florence and its thematization in his poetic work appear to have their foundations in a more general idea of exile as the inevitable condition of the human soul. Such was pilgrimage in the Middle Ages: a pervasive concept and a metaphorical image for life as passage, as transition through the physical world.⁶¹

Dante visualizes life as pilgrimage when narrating his journey through the afterworld. Once Dante is forever uprooted from Florence and condemned never to return to his homeland, he deployed exile more literally as the condition that defines him as poet and as Christian. As do the pilgrims traveling to the Veronica relic, Dante will have to abandon his home town and will suffer the discomfort and danger of long and tortuous peregrinations. His metaphorical use of pilgrimage reveals that in the minute folds of his literary texts, his notion of exile, hidden behind the figurative concealment of pilgrimage, precedes the factual occurrence of his own political exile. What textually appears to be a minor reference to the well-known medieval relic of the Veronica cloth discloses the crucial pattern of pilgrimage as exile, thereby establishing further connections between the *Vita nova* and the *Divine Comedy*.

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NOTES

1. While I am aware of the recent re-editing of the *Vita nova* with new chapter divisions (Dante Alighieri, *Vita nova*, edited by Guglielmo Gorni [Torino: Einaudi, 1996]), in this study I follow the

more traditional chapter divisions, which were first established by Michele Barbi in *La vita nuova. Opere minori di Dante Alighieri*, edited by Michele Barbi (Firenze: Società Dantesca Italiana, 1907).

2. Historical studies on medieval pilgrimages provide the necessary source of information to understand Dante's fictional, symbolical encounter with the pilgrims going through Florence in the *Vita nova*. Presumably, Dante recognizes the group of people as pilgrims because of the traditional outfit and the special badges or icons they wear. The following studies have proven particularly useful for the acquisition of general information concerning pilgrimages and pilgrims in the Middle Ages and beyond: Debra J. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages. Continuity and Change* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 1998), 150–202; Julia Bolton Holloway, *The Pilgrim and the Book. A Study of Dante, Langland and Chaucer* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 1–18; Franco Cardini, "Presentazione," in Renato Stopani, *Le grandi vie di pellegrinaggio del medioevo. Le strade per Roma* (Roma: Centro Studi Romei, 1986), XII; Alan Kendall, *Medieval Pilgrims* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 95–100; Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage. An Image of Mediaeval Religion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 98–113 and 168–210; Christian K. Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage. The Literature of Discovery in Fourteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 42–59.

3. Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova*, edited by Tommaso Casini, revised edn introduced by Cesare Segre (Firenze: Sansoni, 1978), 201. The English translation is by Mark Musa, *La Vita Nuova of Dante Alighieri* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1957), 82. All quotations are taken from these editions.

4. Casini/Segre, 201; Musa, 82.

5. Casini/Segre, 203, Musa, 83. Because of the suffering caused by the absence of familiar things and people, pilgrimage resembles exile or exodus. For this connection, see Holloway, *Pilgrim*, 11: "Real pilgrims in the Middle Ages were conscious of themselves as mirroring the Exodus' Israelites wandering in the Wilderness of Sinai and of likewise carnally lusting after the 'fleshpots of Egypt.'"

6. The surprising factor in the episode is underlined by Steven Botterill's extensive study on the role of Bernard of Clairvaux in Dante's *Commedia*. See Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition. Bernard of Clairvaux in the 'Commedia'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 65: "The first thing to be said about Bernard's involvement in the *Commedia* is simple enough: it comes as a surprise. Nothing in the poem prepares the reader for it; nothing overtly justifies it." According to Botterill, the Saint's anonymity for almost the entire duration of his encounter with Dante is the author's intentional device: "The poem's own rhythm, in short, requires that Bernard remain temporarily anonymous; and readings or commentaries that overlook this requirement, based as they must be on the exegete's prior familiarity with the text and not on the way in which the text is actually encountered by readers, are false to the real workings of the *Commedia*" (67).

7. Concerning the insistence of Dante's text on the topic of vision, see Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, 71: "From the outset [. . .], the encounter between Dante and Bernard is pervaded by the connected motifs of eyes and sight."

8. Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, edited by Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1988); *The "Commedia" of Dante Alighieri*, translated by Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).

9. Paul Perdrizet reports the far-fetched and dubiously reliable theory according to which the Veronica image would have originated in the Balkan region. Although the critic distances himself from this formulation, he does relate the notion to Dante's mention of Croatia in *Paradiso* 31. See Paul Perdrizet, "De la Véronique et de Sainte Véronique," *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, 5 (1932): 4.

10. There are similar occurrences of disbelief in the *Commedia*, which are likewise emphasized by means of a simile. For example, when Virgil introduces himself to Sordello, Dante underlines Sordello's sense of amazement at finding himself standing before the soul of the famous Latin poet. The similarity between the two passages appears more intense because of the identical words introducing the simile, "qual è colui che . . .":

Qual è colui che cosa innanzi sé
subita vede ond' e' si maraviglia,

che crede e non, dicendo "Ella è . . . non è . . .",
tal parve quelli; e poi chinò le ciglia,
e umilmente ritornò ver' lui,
e abbracciòl là 've 'l minor s'appiglia. (*Purg.* 7:10–15)

[Even like one who, suddenly, has seen
something before him and then, marveling,
does and does not believe, saying, "It is . . .
is not," so did Sordello seem, and then
he bent his brow, returned to Virgil humbly,
and clasped him where the lesser presence clasps.].

11. According to Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition*, 77, up to this point Bernard's identity remains unclear and "[i]t is the connection with the Virgin Mary that both makes the identification of Bernard unequivocal and begins to make it possible to understand the symbolic function in the *Commedia*."

12. The connection between the contemplation of Bernard's face and the vision of God acquires increased interest considering that the concept of Christ's face as a mirror in which angels reflect their image is Bernard's: "Vultum tuum, bone Jesu, desiderabilem, in quem desiderant Angeli prospicere." See Bernard of Clairvaux, *Speculum humanitatis Salvatoris* XIX, 47, *Oeuvres complètes*, quoted in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, translated by William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993) Vol. I, 53, 226.

13. For the difference between painted and unpainted kinds of relics, see Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 53–57.

14. Giraldus Cambrensis, *Speculum ecclesiae*, in *Opera*, edited by J. S. Brewer (London: Longman & Co., 1873), IV, 278–279. James F. Rhodes, referring to Giraldus Cambrensis, states that "the Veronica was the most popular pilgrim attraction in Rome in the late Middle Ages." See "The Pardoner's Vernicle and His Vera Icon," *Modern Language Studies* 13, no. 2 (1983): 34.

15. That the Veronica cloth was the most popular relic in St. Peter's until 1527 is also the opinion of Paul Perdrizet, whose seminal article on the tradition of the Veronica considers all the theological and art-historical implications a devotion to this type of relic necessarily raises (3). Perdrizet points out that Dante probably witnessed the intensity of popular devotion to the Veronica during the jubilee of 1300 (4). See Paul Perdrizet, "De la Véronique et de Sainte Véronique," 1–15. Franco Cardini confirms the importance of the Veronica as the most venerated relic in all Christendom for at least two centuries. See Cardini, "Presentazione," in Stopani, *Le grandi vie*, xiv. In the same text, Stopani himself states that pilgrimages to Rome acquired new energy after the institution of the jubilee in 1300, and it was around the same time that particular veneration of the Veronica cloth began: "Specie con l'istituzione dei giubilei e della relativa inflazione dei giubilei, il pellegrinaggio a Roma . . . riprese vigore. Negli stessi anni ebbe inizio la particolare venerazione della cosiddetta 'Veronica.'" (*Le grandi vie di pellegrinaggio del medioevo. Le strade per Roma*, 6). Information concerning the increased popularity of the Veronica relic during the second half of the thirteenth century is also given by Debra J. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages*, 199; 202.

16. This piece of information is offered by Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages*, 179; for the popularity of the Veronica, see also 193–194.

17. For comprehensive information concerning the history of the Veronica relic, see Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth. History, Symbolism, and Structure of a "True" Image* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 4–5 *et passim*. This monographic volume gives detailed historical information on the Veronica veil, but also proposes an interpretation of the legend according to the theoretical guidelines put forth by cultural studies and gender studies.

18. The legendary origin of the Veronica caused historians and critics to propose different dates for its appearance in Rome, but all dates proposed gravitate around the end of the twelfth century or

the beginning of the thirteenth. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 208 and 218, connects the disappearance of the "Mandylion of Edessa," which vanished after the sack of Constantinople in 1202, with the increased veneration of the Veronica in Rome in the course of the thirteenth century, and speculates that the Roman relic dates from the beginning of the thirteenth century. Similarly, Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative. The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Doornspijk, The Netherlands: Davaco Publishers, 1984), 70, assumes that the Veronica was kept in Rome "at least since the twelfth century." Likewise, Peter Eikemeier, *Hans Memling: Johannes und Veronika. Meditationsbilder aus dem späten Mittelalter* (München: Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, 1995), 21.

19. Giovanni Villani, *La cronaca*, edited by G. Volpi (Firenze: La Voce, n.d.), VIII. 36: "per consolazione de' Christiani pellegrini, ogni venerdì, o dì solenne di festa, si mostrava in San Pietro la Veronica del sudario di Cristo" (28).

20. Francesco Petrarca, "Movese il vecchierel canuto et bianco," *Canzoniere*, edited by Gianfranco Contini with an introduction by Roberto Antonelli and notes by Daniele Ponchiroli (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), 68:

Movesi il vecchierel canuto et bianco
del dolce loco ov'ha sua età fornita,
et da la famigliuola sbigottita
che vede il caro padre venir manco;
indi trahendo poi l'antiquo fianco
per l'extreme giornate di sua vita,
quanto più pò col buon voler s'aita,
rotto dagli anni, et dal camino stanco;
et viene a Roma, seguendo 'l desio,
per mirar la sembianza di colui
ch'ancor lassù nel ciel vedere possa:
così, lasso, talor vo cerchand'io,
donna, quanto è possibile, in altrui
la disiata vostra forma vera.

The translation is by Robert M. Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems. The "Rime sparse" and Other Lyrics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 50:

The little white-haired pale old man leaves the sweet place where
he has filled out his age and his fear-stricken little family, who
watch their dear father disappear;
thence dragging his ancient flanks through the last days of his
life, as much as he can he helps himself with good will, broken
by the years and tired by the road;
and he comes to Rome, following his desire, to gaze on the
likeness of Him whom he hopes to see again up there in Heaven.
Thus, alas, at times I go searching in others, Lady, as much as is
possible, for your longed-for true form.

21. Critical studies on Petrarca's sonnet emphasize the relation between the vision of the Veronica relic at the end of the man's life and the expectation of a higher, divine vision. See, for example, Michelangelo Picone, "*Vita Nuova*" e tradizione romanza (Padova: Liviana, 1979), 129–192 and Lucienne Portier, "'Movese il vecchierel . . .': Une nouvelle interprétation du sonnet de Pétrarque," *Études italiennes*, 5 (1935): 329–336.

22. William Langland, *Piers the Plowman*. Passus V 520–540. See *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman together with Richard the Redeless*, edited by Walter W. Skeat (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1886 [1969]), vol. I, 180–182 [Text B]. The translation into modern English is from

William Langland, *Piers the Plowman*, translated with an introduction by Margaret Williams (New York: Random House, 1971), 129:

But no-one was wise enough to know the way;
they blundered like beasts over banks and hills,
till, late and far afield, they found a man
wearing Saracen dress, as pilgrims do.
He bore a staff with a broad strip of cloth
wound all about it like twisting woodbine.
A bag and a bowl were bound to his side,
hundreds of little phials were set on his hat,
souvenirs from Sinai, shells from Galicia,
on his cloak crosses and the keys of Rome,
a Veronica trinket. These told all men
by many signs what shrines he had sought.
The people first asked him where he came from.
"From Sinai," he said, "from Our Lord's sepulcher;
Bethlehem, Babylon, I've been in both,
Armenia, Alexandria, and other places.
You can see by my signs sewn to my hat
that I've roamed widely, in wet and dry weather,
and sought out good saints, for my soul's health."

23. *Vita nova*. Casini/Segre, 202–203, Musa, 82.

24. Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Pardoner's Tale," in *The Canterbury Tales*. Translated by David Wright (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 394–410.

25. Prologue 685, *The Canterbury Tales*. See *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by Walter Skeat (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919), 427. The study by James F. Rhodes, "The Pardoner's *Vernycle* and his *Vera Icon*," 34–40, focuses on this particular emblem in the "Pardoner's Tale" and highlights its significance for Chaucer's narration in general and for the protagonist in particular.

26. Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, 4, stresses that the origin of vernicles was in the east: "Cloth . . . enjoyed special popularity in Byzantine art . . . A synonym for dress and skin, it represented a perfect material for visualizing God's 'clothing' in Mary's flesh."

27. On the subject of *acheiropoietoi*, see Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, 28–33, who remarks that the category of *acheiropoietoi* was very broad and comprised many different artifacts which were believed to be divine creation.

28. In medieval theology nature was viewed as God's daughter, while art, being the daughter of divinity's offspring, human beings, was God's granddaughter.

29. For information regarding the traditional devotion of the Stations of the Cross, the following texts have been informative: John Cordelier, *The Path of the Eternal Wisdom. A Mystical Commentary on the Way of the Cross* (London: John M. Watkins, 1922); Eric Gill, *Stations of the Cross* (Wilkes-Barre, PA: The Collins Press, n.d.); Marie Rouanet, *The Way of the Cross. The Women of Jerusalem Follow Jesus*, translated by Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1986); "Stations of the Cross," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 11.467–8; "Stations of the Cross," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, second Edition (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003), 14.499–501, which considers "the meeting with Veronica . . . a later inclusion" (500). Paul Perdrizet calls the station of Veronica's encounter with Christ the Fourth Station of the Cross, not the Sixth; see "De Véronique et de Sainte Véronique," 7.

30. The episode is reported by the synoptic gospels: Matthew 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48.

31. For the structural similarities between the two episodes see Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, 5–6.

32. Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, 5.

33. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Storia ecclesiastica*, translated [into Italian] by Giuseppe Del Ton (Firenze: Salani, 1943), II.VII.18 (122–124).

34. The passage by John of Antioch, also known as Malalas, is reported by Tiziana Maria DiBlasio, *Veronica, il mistero del volto. Itinerari iconografici, memoria e rappresentazione* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2000), 26–27. The text referred to is *Chronographia* X. 236.17–240, 2.

35. See similar remarks on this point by Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, 5.

36. A brief summary of the Veronica legend in various ancient texts is offered by Nicky Zwijnenburg-Tönnies, "Das Verhältnis zwischen Dichtung und Ikonographie am Beispiel der 'Veronica,'" *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 30 (1990): 159.

37. Jacobus de Varagine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, vol. I, 212. Further relation to Christ's Passion is established by the editorial title given to the section on the Veronica, which is called "The Passion of the Lord."

38. *Golden Legend*, I, 212.

39. Gertrude Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, translated by Janet Seligman (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1972), vol. II, 78. Tiziana Maria DiBlasio also identifies in Argenteuil's text the inextricable connection between the Veronica story and the crucifixion: "Bisogna aspettare il 1300 e la *Bible en français* di Roger Argenteuil perché la leggenda assuma il suo carattere definitivo, ed è soltanto a partire da questo momento che si viene a creare un legame inscindibile tra la Veronica, il suo gesto e la *Via crucis*." (*Veronica. Il mistero del volto*, 34).

40. Paul Perdrizet, "De la Véronique et de Sainte Véronique," 7.

41. Paul Perdrizet, "De la Véronique et de Sainte Véronique," 7 and 9, is mostly concerned with the appearance of the first pictorial representations of Veronica wiping Christ's face, and sees the origin of the legendary episode in such artistic representations, instead of assuming the opposite dynamic of art representing a true or imaginary fact. He connects the episode, which would have occurred shortly before Christ's execution, to the mystery plays performed in front of the executioner's block by the *Confrères de la Passion* in Paris in the fifteenth century. His theory is mostly based on the first pictorial representations of the Veronica, which the author dates to the fifteenth century.

42. Adolphe Napoléon Didron remarks on the fact that, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the crucifixion becomes a privileged subject of Christian art and Christ is almost invariably represented hanging from the cross. See *Christian Iconography. The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*, translated by E. J. Millington (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1965), vol. I, 258.

43. Catachresis is defined as the figure of speech of an error, an absence, or *paupertas sermonis*. See Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*, translated by Matthew T. Bliss, Annemiek Jansen, and David E. Orton; edited by David E. Orton and R. Dean Anderson (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1998), § 402; § 551; § 562; § 577.

44. As representation of Christ, the Veronica offers the Christian worshiper the opportunity to circumvent the command to believe without seeing. This visionary aspect of the Veronica in the Christian faith is highlighted by Carroll Hilles, "The Sacred Image and the Healing Touch: The Veronica in Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 564.

45. Pilgrimage is defined as a painful experience by Renato Stopani, *Le grandi vie*, 1.

46. The expression "journey to Beatrice" is a borrowing from Charles Singleton's well-known study by the same title, *Journey to Beatrice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1977).

47. The ending of the *Vita nova* has been the subject of endless philological disquisitions in an attempt to date its composition and state with reasonable certainty whether Dante wrote it as a real announcement of the *Commedia*, or whether he manipulated a previous ending once he had already sketched and begun his major work.

48. *Vita nova* 40, Casini/Segre, 199–202; Musa, 82–83.

49. As demonstration of the sacredness of their incipient journey, pilgrims were dressed and blessed by the bishop in the course of a special ritual at the moment of their departure. The formula used by bishops during the *vestitio* is reported by E. R. Labande, "Recherches sur les pèlerins dans l'Europe des XIème et XIIIème siècles," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* I (1958), 162, n. 29; the topic of *benedictio peregrinorum* is also touched on by Holloway, *The Pilgrim and the Book*, 3.

50. The *Imitatio Christi* peremptorily proposes to substitute actual pilgrimages with a pilgrimage of the soul. Thomas À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, translated by Leo Shirley-Price (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Classics, 1980), 1.23 (58). The relation of pilgrimage to *stabilitas loci* is investigated by Christian K. Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage*, 49.

51. *Vita nova* 41. Casini/Segre, 204–205; Musa, 84.

52. “Oltre la spera,” *Vita Nova* 41. Casini/Segre, 208; Musa, 85.

53. For this concept see Louis Marin, “The Figurability of the Visual: The Veronica or the Question of the Portrait at Port-Royal,” *New Literary History*, 22–2 (1991): 285.

54. For the concept of any book as pilgrimage of the soul in medieval literature, see Holloway, *The Pilgrim and the Book*, 217–18.

55. The definition of pilgrim as *homo viator* and the concept of pilgrimage as exile are investigated by Renato Stopani, *Le grandi vie*, 1: “una volta distaccatosi dalla vita di tutti i giorni e dall’ambiente familiare, in una sorta di piccolo ‘procurato esilio,’ espressione di quella segreta ed interiore nostalgia d’Esilio legata ad ogni genuina manifestazione dello spirito, il pellegrino collocava la sua esistenza sul piano dell’eternità, incamminandosi verso i luoghi ove si sarebbe verificato l’incontro illuminante, dove la Grazia si sarebbe profusa più tangibilmente che altrove.”

56. Dante refers to life as pilgrimage, for example, in *Purg.* 13:94–96, when one of the envious souls corrects Dante-pilgrim’s question on whether any of the souls he is addressing was Italian:

“O frate mio, ciascuna è cittadina
d’una vera città; ma tu vuo’ dire
che vivesse in Italia peregrina.”

[“My brother, each of us is citizen
of one true city: what you meant to say
was ‘one who lived in Italy as pilgrim.’”]

57. For life as mystical pilgrimage toward God, see Hilles, “Sacred Image,” 562–63.

58. Immediately after committing their sin, Adam and Eve “sewed fig-leaves together to make themselves loin-cloths” (Genesis 3:7b). Later it is said that “Yahweh God made tunics of skins for the man and his wife and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21).

59. For this association, which appears to be far-fetched, but certainly worth reporting, see Holloway, *The Pilgrim and the Book*, 3. The quoted paragraph begins with the following introduction: “In *Genesis* Adam and Eve sin and are expelled from Eden. The text has God garb the parents of mankind as were medieval pilgrims to be: ‘Fecit quoque Dominus Deus et uxori eius tunicas pelliceas et induit eos’ [Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skin, and clothed them] (3.21).”

60. The connection between pilgrimage and exile in the *Vita nova* is also established by Holloway, *The Pilgrim and the Book*, 6: “Dante, soon himself to be exiled, in the *Vita Nuova* prophetically defined the pilgrim as an exile.”

61. While reflecting on Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages, Donald R. Howard writes: “*pilgrimage* was a metaphor for human life: life is a one-way passage to the Heavenly Jerusalem and we are pilgrims on it.” See *Writers and Pilgrims. Medieval Pilgrimages, Narratives, and Their Posterity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 6–7.

Embodiment in the *Commedia*: Dante's Exilic and Poetic Self-Consciousness

YEO WEI WEI

Dante's vision in the *Commedia* incorporates a range of materials from medieval theology, philosophy, politics, history, and autobiography: these provide the concrete details that evoke the particularity of his otherworld and the protagonist's journey in it. Following the pilgrim, the reader is privy to the thoughts, memories, perceptions, and emotions of shades that bear the imprint of their earthly individuality even as they have passed on into the afterlife. Forever displaced from the earthly milieu, Dante's shades are no longer earthly selves. Actual immateriality belies particularity and substance made possible and vivid through poetry. The reader can be excused for forgetting this: Dante's shades have highly individualized bodies and relate to the pilgrim and the others around them as if they were still alive and earthly.¹ Dante implies this when he shows how characters sometimes forget themselves and where they are. Virgil has to remind Statius in the famous episode when the latter attempts to embrace his feet: "Frate, / non far, ché tu se' ombra e ombra vedi" [Brother, do not so, for you are a shade and a shade you see.] (*Purgatorio* 21:131–132). Dante as pilgrim is no less fallible to the fiction; in *Purgatorio* 2:76–81 he attempts to embrace his old friend Casella, only to find his arms wrapping around air and then his own chest. The corporeality of shades in Dante's otherworld foregrounds what Caroline Bynum rightly calls a "fundamental strategy" in the writing of the poem: "Dante deliberately gives body—individualized body—to the human soul at exactly that moment, theologically and ontologically speaking, at which it has none."² The shades' semblance of corporeality reveals Dante's engagement with a debate that dates from the early church

about the relation between soul and body in the interim between death and resurrection.³ Dante asserts this relation through his portrayal of shades as almost-bodies: though aerial, each shade still has physical consequence, like a flame that bears the properties of fire (*Purgatorio* 25:97–99). The soul has body because of body's integral relation to identity.⁴ Dante's imagination of the otherworld underlines this: the individuality of each shade is preserved in every bodily aspect, from facial features down to quirks of speech. A number of illuminating studies have dealt with Dante's strategy of embodiment.⁵ This essay aims to join in the discussion by examining the role that exile plays in Dante's high regard for body; it will show that Dante's project in the *Commedia* is as ontological as it is poetic. I will also be exploring the ways in which Dante's poetic self-consciousness, his sense of place in literary history, is manifest in his representation of poets and texts as embodied presences. The curious inconsistency of Virgil's shade-corporeality will be explored as a kind of register for Dante's anxiety of influence.⁶ Through the "resurrection" of Virgil as a character, Dante's poem signals its appropriation of Virgil's works: the classical *corpus* is incorporated and re-invented in the medieval body of the *Commedia*.



When Dante wrote his letter to Can Grande explaining the way to approach his poem, he used the Exodus, the narrative of the exile of the Israelites and their journey to the Promised Land, to illustrate the layers of meaning beyond the literal. The biblical reference serves another function: it reminds the reader of the primacy of exile in the poet's conception of his poem, an aspect that is reinforced throughout the text in the prophetic utterances of characters who forewarn the pilgrim of his exilic destiny. At the time of writing, Dante was already in exile from Florence. His exilic self-consciousness is imprinted on the *Commedia* most evidently in the instances of prophecy, where the pilgrim is reminded again and again of the suffering that will come and of how his only hope and responsibility rests in his art. The narrative manifests Dante's vulnerability in more subtle ways as well. In the poem Dante is a pilgrim who has lost "la diritta via" [the straight way] (*Inferno* 1:3) and is on his way home to God. In *Inferno* he meets shades whose fates contrast starkly with his in that they are all forever exiled from God; Virgil is the most notable case.

The emphasis on Dante the pilgrim's journey as homecoming and his special status amongst all the characters (including those in *Paradiso*, for they had not undertaken such a journey before death) lays bare the poet's urgent need to establish his identity as someone not in exile in the divine scheme of things. He makes this point most insistently by drawing attention to the pilgrim's human corporeality. This bears a freight of ontological significance.

The pilgrim is the only character in the *Commedia* who possesses an earthly human body: his body, like his mobility, signifies his "ampio privilegio" [ample privilege] (*Purgatorio* 26:127). As poet outside the poem, Dante's situation was totally unlike that of his pilgrim: he had been stripped of his Florentine citizenship (1302 and 1311) and sentenced to death in verdicts passed in absentia (1302 and 1315).⁷ Florence and other Italian cities in the middle ages resembled the ancient Greek *polis*. There was the same deep attachment to the native town: the commune was the focus of life for every citizen, its walls served as much to protect the people from external threats as to remind them of their civic identity.⁸ "To be in exile beyond one's hometown was thus to be beyond the pale of fortification which served to define, defend, and contain it not only in times of siege but also in the rhythms of everyday life."⁹ As suggested by Publilius's maxim on exile ("Exilium patitur patriae qui se denegat"), a representative statement that culminates from classical and medieval notions of exile, the break with the home country that occurs in exile "is not simply [a break] with space or location but with the cultural and social continuities of place and with a collective history."¹⁰ Tellingly, exile is called a fate next to death in the exchange between the pilgrim and Charles Martel:

Ond' elli ancora: "Or di: sarebbe il peggio
per l'omo in terra, se non fosse cive?"
"Sì," rispuos' io, "e qui ragion non cheggio." (*Paradiso* 8:115–117)

[Whereupon he again: "Now say, would it be worse for man on earth if he were not a citizen?"

"Yes," I replied, "and here I ask for no proof."]

The exile is someone who leads a death-like existence. "The pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth," writes Edward Said.¹¹ Put another way: a person in exile endures

a daily state of ontological crisis. Geographically displaced from his native home and politically disenfranchised without a community to call his own, the exile is dispossessed on all levels of being. The ontological rupture signified by the loss of citizenship would have been compounded for Dante and his contemporaries by the religious and moral connotations of exile. Following the biblical analogy of the Israelites' exile in Babylon, the church fathers use exile to describe the distance of earthly men from heaven.¹² For Augustine and Bernard, exile evokes separation from God insofar as one is also exiled from oneself.¹³ Dante evokes the alienation of man from God in his references to exile as "lo essilio / di Babillòn" [the exile of Babylon] (*Paradiso* 23:134–135); and to Adam's "essilio" from Eden (*Paradiso* 26:116). "The long tradition that spoke of the Christian's early life as a kind of punishment and preparation in exile for the heavenly Jerusalem" meant that:

[t]he symbolic contrasts between the wanderings of exiles and the ever-elusive homecoming invested the experience of personal, political banishments with moral and religious values.¹⁴

Writing the *Commedia* during exile, Dante forged his poetic voice while living day-to-day in a state of ontological crisis.¹⁵ Exile construed as alienation in political and primordial terms of existence means in effect a life subjected to extreme and relentless duress. This is brought home, for instance, when Cacciaguida speaks of his "testimonio" as that which "sì ch'a te fia bello / averti fatta parte per te stesso." [so that it will be for your fair fame to have made you a party by yourself] (*Paradiso* 17:68–69). Jorge Luis Borges rightly comments that Dante's "tenderness" is too often neglected; he draws attention to the image of defensiveness in Dante's statement about what he has to go through in *Paradiso* 17:23–24:

... ch'io mi senta
ben tetragono ai colpi di ventura.

[... I feel myself truly foursquare against the blows of chance.]

The cuboid self-image, evoking man as "the most solid of volumes," is an image of absolute resistance.¹⁶ Pressures weighed upon Dante from all sides. Apart from the external threat to his life, he was also burdened by expectations he had of himself and the exertions he had to go through in

pursuit of these. These can be seen in the *Commedia's* goals of poetic achievement and political recovery—all part of Dante's hope for an honourable return (for him, the only acceptable kind) to Florence.

The ontological sense in which Dante felt himself to have become most stripped seems to have been compensated through the singular person of his pilgrim in the poem. On another level, the pilgrim's singularity signifies the unique achievement of the poem: Dante's body in the poem offers a dramatic parallel for the claims made for the poet's other *corpus*, the poem. As Helen Vendler has explained: "in lyric writing, style in its largest sense is best understood as a material body"; a new style "presses upon the poet" like "[a] new sense of life."¹⁷ The *Commedia* reveals Dante's sense of his new voice in it: his self-consciousness is articulate in the repeated instances of prophecy and instruction to the pilgrim about the poetry he must write upon his return to the world; it can also be inferred from instances of retrospective analysis of his stilnovist poetics in the *Commedia*.¹⁸ Although Vendler's notion of style as body is applied to her study of lyric poets, it is nonetheless useful here; it avails one way of seeing embodiment as manifestation of Dante's sense of the poem's breakthrough within its own narrative. This is most visible in the second canticle where Dante has placed most of his poet-shades. Through the pilgrim's unique human corporeality and its contrast to the aerial bodies of Statius, Bonagiunta da Lucca, Arnaut Daniel and others, Dante embodies his poetic claims.

The phenomenology of Dante's shades is curious, particularly since he has endowed them with the semblance of corporeality. There is a technical explanation for this. "It is impossible to create imaginative persons if one has not created a space for them," Elaine Scarry reminds us.¹⁹ In Dante's case, apart from verisimilitude, the different kinds of bodies, evoked through the contrast in the shades' immateriality with the pilgrim's fleshly person, impresses the latter's solidity upon us. The passing of filmy or ghostly surfaces over solid things in our imagination "reproduces one of the ways touch can be visually inferred in the material world."²⁰ The objects in our imagination seem to be more akin to phenomena that share their immateriality, phenomena with "Sartrean features of thinness and transparency."²¹ Scarry proposes that this is the reason why ghost stories are compelling, "convincing and believable": "the story instructs its hearers to create an image whose own properties are second

nature to the imagination.”²² At the same time, one notes that the emphasis on the pilgrim’s human body comes across mainly in his meetings with other poet-shades. This suggests that Dante’s embodiment strategy is invested with more meaning than simply verisimilitude.

Indeed, as Bynum has shown, Dante’s shade-bodies are not simply imaginings. They are “an expression of ontology”, making each soul clearly distinct from the other; they are also “an adumbration of the real body [the soul] will have when the trumpet blows.”²³ Dante’s somato-morphic souls show the influence of early Christian literature on journeys and visions of the afterlife; they also manifest “many of the technical concerns of scholarly theology as well as the themes of the otherworld-journey narrative” in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries.²⁴ Notably, Dante makes his own distinctive contribution:

Although borrowing much from the imagery and structure of earlier apocalypse and vision literature, Dante differed from it in making positive (as well as negative) use of images of biological change, in providing technical discussion of aerial bodies as aerial, and in depicting fully individual and historical figures, not merely types, classes, or statuses. He differed most of all in ringing complicated changes throughout his poem on the question of the nature both of body and of awareness of embodiment.²⁵

The pilgrim’s exceptional body is a striking figure for Dante the poet’s self-conscious creativity in writing a new kind of vernacular poetry, and perhaps more aptly, in his bold representation of the afterlife soul as shade-body.²⁶ The pilgrim’s confusion of the shade-bodies he meets for “real” bodies subtly foregrounds the poet’s audacious acts of imagination throughout the poem.²⁷ Manfred’s wounds, as John Freccero points out, draw attention to the presence of the poet and “his intervention in the fiction that otherwise purports to be unmediated representation of the other world.”²⁸



The embodied presences of poets and texts in the *Commedia* suggest that literary tradition is endowed with proportions of “volume” beyond the textual: texts become voluble through the speech and conversation of poets; poets are voluminous as humanized shade-bodies. An instance of the first sort of embodiment can be found in Dante’s representation of his

knowledge of Statius through Juvenal's *Satires*. In *Convivio* IV.xxv.6 Dante refers to Statius as the sweet poet ("lo dolce poeta"), following Juvenal's description of Statius in *Satires* 7:82–86.²⁹ The same reference appears again in the *Commedia* when Statius introduces himself to Dante and Virgil, beginning with the line: "Tanto fu dolce mio vocale spirto" [So sweet was my spirit of song] (*Purgatorio* 21:88).³⁰ Interestingly, Dante also represents his source by appointing Juvenal as the poet from whom Virgil first learns of Statius' esteem for him. Literary history is embodied as the hearsay of poets and this in turn is represented as the spark of relations between poets as well as a source of comfort to them, seen for instance in Virgil's recounting to Statius when they meet in Purgatory:

onde da l'ora che tra noi discese
nel limbo de lo 'nferno Giovenale,
che la tua affezion mi fê palese,
mia benvoglienza inverso te fu quale
più strinse mai di non vista persona,
sì ch'or mi parran corte queste scale. (*Purgatorio* 22: 13–18)

[wherefore, from the hour when Juvenal descended among us in the Limbo of Hell and made your affection known to me, my good will toward you has been such as never yet did bind to an unseen person, so that these stairs will now seem short to me.]

"[P]alese" evokes Juvenal as a voluble source; "tra noi discese / nel limbo dello 'nferno Giovenale" is also suggestive of Juvenal's embodied presence and the direct or face-to-face contact he made with Virgil and the other *auctores* when he went down to the first circle. Dante's embodiment of the quotation from Juvenal as well as the act of quotation itself draw attention to the phenomenological as well as communal aspect of literary intercourse between poets, a departure from the flatness and muteness of words on the sheets of a manuscript. The difference between Dante's copying of Juvenal's reference to Statius in the *Convivio* and the embodiment of these words in the *Commedia* points to a contrast of flatness and volume, a contrast of script and sound. The embodiment of the reference in actual sounds or in the Juvenal character's physical movements suggests that Juvenal's words in the *Satires*, particularly those concerning Statius, inhabit Dante's mind in a distinctive phenomenal sense, like a persistent echo in a room. This guides us to an important implication of embodiment: by embodying tradition, Dante is perhaps trying to convey his sense

of how texts do move their readers in more literal ways than we expect. As Rebecca West writes in her essay on the corporeality of shades and souls in the *Commedia*:

We have a fiction to explain a fiction; poetry to explain poetry: but the fiction is of a *corporeality*, a form endowed with sensory capacities . . . Dante's inventions, solidly anchored in the accessible realm of the senses as well as in the rarified atmosphere of the most complex abstractions, continue centuries after in their incarnation in words to "walk around our rooms," so that we see them "from all sides" and are always "touched" by them.³¹

West's observation reminds us that Dante's representation of literary tradition emphasizes the actual relationships between poets. Dante's poets are animate shadow-beings with human physiognomies and poetic relations are shown to be no different from other kinds of interpersonal relationships. Tradition is represented as a community: throughout the poem *auctores* and poets, contemporaneous with or less historically remote to Dante, meet, exchange smiles, greetings and news about themselves or other poets.

In *Purgatorio* 22 Statius and Virgil walk alongside each other, engaged in a conversation about poetry; Dante follows close behind, attentive and deferential:

Elli givan dinanzi, e io soletto
di retro, e ascoltava i lor sermoni,
ch'a poetar mi davano intelletto. (*Purgatorio* 22:127–129)

[They were going on in front, and I solitary behind, and I was listening to their speech, which gave me understanding in poetry.]

While the scene evokes Dante's sense of tradition as a meeting-place for poets, it also illustrates Dante's awareness of the vital influence of others in his writing, and this awareness permeates his oeuvre—from the first sonnet "A ciascun alma presa" in the *Vita nuova* to the *Commedia* and especially *Purgatorio*. Here Dante enacts his sense of the living and vibrant influence of earlier poets in his work by depicting himself following in the footsteps of Virgil and Statius. The pilgrim's eavesdropping on the Latin poets' conversation about poetry also illustrates this. The exchange between Virgil and Statius concerns the writing of poetry, Dante tells us; and although he does not divulge any details, the poets' walking together

reflects their conference on poetic craftsmanship. Feet, metre, rhythm and rhyme feature in the poets' topic of conversation as well as in the physical drama of their meeting, walking and talking together. The walk thus embodies Dante's tribute to the two Latin poets as it affirms, by the same token, Dante's relation to them.

The scene implies Dante's self-consciousness about the *auctores'* influence in his poetics, of which more will be said later. While Dante's historical relation to Virgil and Statius (his "belatedness", as Harold Bloom would say) is represented by his traipsing after these two earlier poets, the scene may also be viewed as an emblem of the poets' communion across time through the common concern of poetry. Dante's poetic community in the *Commedia* is neither defined nor constrained by coordinates of place. Although most of Dante's poets reside in Purgatory, they are dispersed over different terraces. But the way they behave on the occasions when they meet one another suggests that their sense of community does not depend on their being gathered together in the same place. The pagan *auctores'* physical remoteness from poets in Purgatory such as Statius does not prevent the latter from seeing Virgil and himself as members of the same community. The poets' differences in historical and cultural background are also portrayed as inconsequential on occasions like this one. The very event of the poets' walk, how it is possible in the first place, suggests that temporal considerations are laid aside in certain instances of Dante's portrayal of poetic relations. In Canto 22 Virgil, Statius, and Dante meet and congregate in spite of their being historically writers from different times. This is not always the case, as the obstacle that the pagan and Christian divide poses to poetic relations reveals, discussed further on in this essay.

The *auctores* were unquestionable representatives of authority in the Middle Ages.³² As embodied presences in the *Commedia*, the big names revered by Dante from the time he began his studies—the "orrevol gente" [honorable folk] (*Inferno* 4:72) of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates and other ancient writers and the "bella scola" [fair school] (*Inferno* 4:94) of Homer, Horace, Ovid, Lucan and Seneca—are injected with life, their *gravitas* undiminished by their shade-body constitution and their relegation to a circle in Hell (*Inferno* 4:112–114). Perhaps this conveys the extent to which Dante's reading of *auctores* and other writers made his life in exile more tolerable.³³ Their characterization in the poem suggests this: that although they were merely presences in the mind and imagination,

they were old friends he could keep by his side and they made a comforting circle of familiar faces which assuaged, perhaps, some of the pain of the loss of his Florentine home and friends.

Exile would have heightened Dante's sense of the importance of belonging to a community. While the severing of ties with his native community did not so much raise new issues as confirm and develop the ones that already existed, Dante's exile would certainly have further molded his ideas about community. A comparison of his work before and during exile makes this clear. The *Vita nuova* shows that language, the creative process and the poet's or artist's sense of place in society had been germane concerns for Dante from a young age. Exile colored these issues with a greater sense of urgency and imperative. Questions about poetic voice and agency would have become weightier given the altered meaning of audience for Dante as poet in exile. Dante had the support of patrons, political allies, and friends, and he had this audience in mind as he dispatched the *Commedia* to them in instalments during the course of its composition.³⁴ But this situation is markedly different from the kind of audience and support he had in his youth; the *Vita nuova* gives the impression that Dante was part of a small group of like-minded poets and "donne gentili". Dante's prose writings in exile all show to some extent his need to regain or to assert his sense of self in relation to others. Both *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and *Convivio* display Dante's preoccupation with the question of audience despite their different aims and discourses—the first, a treatise on the vernacular and the second, on philosophy. A new sense of Dante's rawness underlies these two works, speaking volumes about the difficulties he faced daily during exile—Dante's difficult and dangerous floating existence between courts in Northern Italy; and in correlation, a sharpened edge to his need for affirmation.



The plight of the pagan *auctores* and writers in Limbo reveals another need that is answered through Dante's embodiment of tradition. If the embodied presences of tradition evoke Dante's sense of tradition as a "place" to which he belongs without fear of expulsion, they also point to Dante's concern with place in the sense of hierarchy. Just as the saints are ranked in *Paradiso* 32:70–72, the poets who appear in the otherworld are ranked in a sustained fashion throughout the narrative.³⁵ Virgil is hailed as

"l'altissimo poeta" (*Inferno* 4:80) amongst the classical authors. The pilgrim acknowledges him as the father of his poetics (*Inferno* 1:79–87), a tribute repeated by Sordello (*Purgatorio* 7:16–19) and Statius (*Purgatorio* 22:94–99). The scene of the poets' walk enacts Statius' tribute to Virgil at the end of the *Thebaid* where he tells his poem to "follow from afar and evermore" and to "worship" the "steps" of "the heavenly *Aeneid* (*Thebaid* 12:816–819). In Dante's poem Statius' modest projection of relation to Virgil is not only fleshed out, but fleshed out to Statius' distinct advantage: Statius and Virgil walk side-by-side, their steps in time. They walk in step despite the historical gap between them; as characters in the *Commedia* their historical selves have been re-written to fulfill Dante's design. That Dante should hint at Statius' parity with Virgil suggests a relation between Dante's ideas about rank and the portrait of literary history he gives in the poem. The same suggestion can be found in the scene of Dante's initiation into the circle of Homer and other masters (*Inferno* 4:100–103). This conveys the double sense of "place" associated with tradition: tradition as a place of community and the ranking of poets placed in it. The scene is certainly emblematic of Dante's sense of belonging to the *auctores*' community; it shows, by the same token, the epic proportions of his ambition. Both sides meet in the paradox that controls the fate of the pagan writers in the *Commedia*. Dante's keenness to establish himself as one of their circle is counter-balanced by his awareness of their incontrovertible divide as pagans and Christian. In this sense, Dante's joy at acceptance into their ranks seems wrong. The paradox points to the dilemma at the heart of Dante's relation with all the classical authors, a dilemma embodied by the kind of body and place Virgil is given.

While corporeal features are not exclusive to Dante's poets, the shade-bodies of poets carry a different freight of meaning compared with that of other characters. Dante's treatment of the poets' shade-bodies seems to offer more than a glimpse of his poetic ambition. Embodiment dramatizes Dante's placing of himself in literary history; therefore it can reveal unspoken tensions and anxieties in Dante's relations with other poets, especially Virgil. In the embrace episodes involving Virgil, Virgil's inconsistent corporeality can be read in terms of Dante's fraught sense of relation to him.³⁶ I turn first to the incident where Statius is stooping to embrace Virgil's feet but is stopped by him:

Già s'inchinava ad abbracciar li piedi
al mio dottor, ma el li disse: "Frate,
non far, ché tu se' ombra e ombra vedi."

Ed ei surgendo: "Or puoi la quantitate
comprender de l'amor ch'a te mi scalda,
quand'io dismento nostra vanitate,
trattando l'ombre come cosa calda." (*Purgatorio* 21:130–136)

[Already he was stooping to embrace my teacher's feet; but he said to him, "– Brother, do not so, for you are a shade and a shade you see." And he, rising, "Now you may comprehend the measure of the love that burns in me for you, when I forget our emptiness and treat shades as solid things."]

Here, I shall dwell on the significance of an embrace before I go on to explore Dante's obstruction of certain poetic embraces. An embrace is a symbolic and bodily gesture of mutual love and respect, a silent but also more than eloquent expression of sympathy and fellowship. Physically a moment of unity, it presents a powerful image of ephemeral but nonetheless concrete at-one-ness. The discreteness which embodies the difference between individuals and keeps them separate momentarily disappears in the act of embrace. The clasping of a person by another is a bodily expression of community, signifying the priority of unity over and above difference. This must be borne in mind when we consider Dante's reason for obstructing Statius' embrace of Virgil.

The obstruction suggests that a certain factor of difference between Virgil and Statius cannot be put aside, not even for a moment. The incompleteness of the embrace is colored with pathos because its obstruction is caused not so much by lack of willingness on Virgil's part as by his recognition of the existence of a particular difference between Statius and himself. Physical impossibility appears to be the reason for the incompleteness of Virgil and Statius' embrace when in fact the physical aspect operates not so much as the cause as the effect of a particular standard of judgment. As George D. Economou points out: "[R]ather than arguing physical impossibility, the text implies the acknowledgement of inappropriateness as the reason for Virgil's refusal and Statius' prompt acquiescence."³⁷ The impropriety of the gesture refers to Virgil and Statius' disparity as pagan and Christian. The *Commedia* is a Christian poem and cannot allow such an expression of identity between parties of the saved and the damned. Statius and Virgil's meeting occurs in a text where starkly different afterlives have been assigned to them. Virgil is one of the damned, exiled from God, his outcast state established from the moment he enters the poem (*Inferno* 1:124–126). Statius, in contrast, is saved: after

more than five hundred years in Purgatory he ascends to the “miglior soglia” [better threshold] (*Purgatorio* 21:69), the only soul whose ascent to Paradise takes place in the poem. Dante situates Statius in Purgatory and then promotes him visibly to Paradise whereas Virgil is denied domicile in these two realms. If allowed to take place, the completion of Virgil's and Statius' embrace would represent an at-one-ness which has no place in the poem according to its system of Christian justice. As Nicolae Iliescu puts it: “Virgilio e Stazio: due anime, due ombre. Diverse e divise, però . . . Tra esse si interpone ferrea “la religione della montagna”, il *noli me tangere* e l'abbraccio non può aver luogo.”³⁸

The difference in the poets' spiritual wellbeing is thus evoked by invisible physical barriers between them. This means that Dante's embodiment of tradition not only conveys the poets' mutual sense of sympathy and community, but it also works as a way of signifying the poets' irreconcilable differences. An additional point needs to be made clear on this second count. The pagan-Christian divide seems paradoxical when considered alongside the evaporation of historical differences in the poets' walk or in any of the poetic encounters throughout the poem. The paradox is pointed: the poets' walk takes place shortly after Statius' failed attempt to embrace Virgil. The timing of the disrupted embrace so close to the poets' walk draws attention to the pathos and the peculiarity of Virgil's physical circumstance. Virgil's shade-body has sufficient volume for him to walk and talk with Statius but not for him to accept the latter's deferential embrace. Virgil's shade-corporeality, like that of all the other characters, embodies Dante's measure of his spiritual wellbeing. Before addressing the particular instance of Virgil, I need to explain the theological underpinning in Dante's depiction of shade-bodies. By his portrayal of souls in the afterlife, Dante enters into the thick of the medieval debate about the soul between death and Last Judgment, and what happens to the body before resurrection. The curious blend of bodily and insubstantial aspects in his aerial shade-bodies reflects the uncertainty of medieval discourses on the interim soul as well as the hope that bodily identity will not be corrupted by death.

The shade-body manifests the individual's moral condition; it is a bodying-forth of the soul's identity on air (*Purgatorio* 25:97–99). The ontology of Dante's shade-bodies is explained in Statius' disquisition in *Purgatorio* 25: a shade-body is made from the same life-source as ordinary

living things (*Purgatorio* 25:52–67). Hence, in *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, punishment is inflicted and penance undertaken through corporeal suffering. The body is made to bear the brunt of the suffering; depending on whether the shade is in Hell or Purgatory, the physical duress will either eventually gain purchase of salvation or not. The theological concept that explains the ontological significance of corporeality resides in the equivalence of being and being Godly, in other words, the vital relation between an individual's obedience to God and his wellbeing. The *Commedia* testifies to Dante's will, as poet and protagonist, toward being Godly. As protagonist, Dante makes a physical journey toward God while the poet in him takes stock of lessons learnt along the way and makes a poem. Both processes show Dante moving and acting in conformity with God's Will. "E 'n la Sua volontade è nostra pace" [And in His Will is our peace] (*Paradiso* 3:85) is a line that sums up the imperative of obedience in the Christian individual's duty toward God. This is of course not a view that is exclusively found in Dante, but it links with his understanding of ontological wholeness and is thus relevant to my explanation of the moral implication of corporeality. The imperative sets a standard that the Christian individual must abide and strive toward. But the standard is founded on God's love, the principle of God's creation of man, so that the striving is in a sense toward something that is given to a life from the moment it comes into being. This explains the direct bearing of being Godly on a person's wellbeing. Not acting in line with the dictates of the "prima voglia" [primal will] (*Purgatorio* 18:59) is tantamount to upsetting one's ontological balance. Kenelm Foster's explanation of the relation between free will and "prima voglia" makes this clear:

[T]he rightness of the "prima voglia", though it underpins morality, is not in itself ethical, for it does not follow choice but precedes it. Being in no way the product of free will, it cannot incur praise or blame . . . What is praiseworthy is any choice in conformity with it; what is blameworthy is any other choice. Its rightness is ontological. It has to do with what man is, prior to anything he does; with man as God's product, not as his own.³⁹

In Virgil's case, neglect or contradiction of the "primal will" is not caused by recalcitrance but a blameless ignorance. Before the choice for or against obedience, there must first be recognition of the existence of the standard for conformity; but this is simply not an option for those who were born before the age of Christianity. This void in Virgil's knowledge

implies his ontological inconsequence from a Christian point of view, which explains, to my mind, Dante's accentuation of Virgil's ontological nonentity at points when he wishes to drive home the pagan-Christian distinction between Virgil and himself. Being pagan in the *Commedia*, where Christian being is the only being that counts, means that Virgil's ontology amounts to nothing. In the embrace incident of *Purgatorio* 21, Dante wants especially to impress this point upon us and he does so by divesting Virgil of his previously intact substantiality, reducing Virgil into a nothingness. The fact that Virgil's shade-body will be denied the perfect corporeality of the resurrection body is implied in his speech on behalf of the pagan shades in Limbo: they live on in endless desire because they have no hope of rising again as bodies.⁴⁰

There is another aspect of Virgil's shade-body which needs to be noted: Virgil has a conspicuously variable corporeality. Much has been said about Dante's denial of salvation to Virgil and how this is suggestive of Dante's complicated feeling toward the master.⁴¹ I want to concentrate instead on how the inconsistencies in Virgil's embodied presence are symptomatic of Dante's vexed relation with Virgil as a poet who is as committed to affirming his relation to the master as he is determined to assert his difference and originality. Because Dante reserved his highest esteem for Virgil, his sense of poetic self must entail a significant measure of rivalry with Virgil and this is evidenced whenever the solid mass of Dante's human body strikes a contrast with Virgil's aerial shade-body. At the same time Dante's embodiment of Virgil conveys his sense of community with the master through physical gestures of affection. Throughout their journey together, Virgil is a comforting and reassuring presence in silent as well as articulate ways. Outside the gate of Hell, Virgil clasps Dante's hand and gives him encouraging looks (*Inferno* 3:19–21). When they emerge from Hell, Virgil cleans Dante's tear-stained face with dew (*Purgatorio* 1:124–129). Dante tells us that when he woke up from his dream about the eagle in cold sweat, he drew comfort from Virgil's presence by his side (*Purgatorio* 9:43).⁴² We may also recall instances in Hell where Virgil physically protects Dante from danger, times such as when Virgil shields Dante's eyes from the Medusa (*Inferno* 9:59–60); or when he gets Dante to hold on to him as they descend to Malebolge on the monster Geryon's shoulders (*Inferno* 17:96). It is on Virgil's breast that Dante sits as they slide down a slope to escape from the Malebranche of the fifth *bolgia* (*Inferno* 23:37–51).⁴³ Interestingly, Virgil's corporeal aspect

in Purgatory is strikingly altered from what it was in Hell. In *Inferno* Virgil's presence is distinctively corporeal on not one but several occasions.⁴⁴ Virgil's reaction to Statius in *Purgatorio* 21 is also curious in its hint of an hitherto absent, or perhaps concealed, self-consciousness and longing for corporeal life. Moreover, on two earlier occasions in Purgatory (*Purgatorio* 6:75; 7:15) the insubstantiality of Virgil and Sordello neither deters nor impedes the completion of their embrace. The conspicuous way in which Dante highlights Virgil's unreliable corporeality suggests that the comparison cannot be dealt with as a simple case of binary opposites even though their bodily difference does principally signal their diametrically different lots in the poem.

Virgil's first utterance hints at his tragic shortcoming on the Christian front. "Non omo, omo già fui" [No, not a living man, though once I was] (*Inferno* 1:67) is a line that foreshadows the contrast between Dante's concrete human presence and Virgil's unreliable shade-body corporeality. As the one and only human being in the poem, Dante's presence is ontologically unique. Moreover, as Christian believer, he has the hope of one day having a resurrection body.⁴⁵ Dante's Christian and poetic distinction from Virgil are fused. Virgil's somatic nonentity embodies his ontological inconsequentiality in the context of Dante's Christian poem; Dante the pilgrim's contrast with Virgil's corporeality evokes Dante's poetic claim against the best in tradition's existing body of literature. The relation with Virgil is thus fraught on account of the moves of self-assertion Dante makes in the *Commedia* as a Christian poet, an inseparable part of which consists of his claims as a vernacular poet. Indeed, Dante's vexed relation to Virgil is bound up with the claims Dante makes for the *Commedia* as Christian testimony and politicized narrative. In *Paradiso* 17 Dante describes the poem as a "testimonio al ver che la dispensa" [witness to the truth which dispenses it] (*Paradiso* 17:54). This conception unifies Dante's religious and political concerns. The poem bears witness to two kinds of events, primordial and historical. It makes a double claim for its veracity as truth: as the poet's response to the truth given to him with his person and the poet's record of the unfolding of truth in external historical action. As poet of prophecy and history, Dante acknowledges the teaching and influence of Virgil; this is clear from the tribute Dante pays to Virgil from the very beginning of the master's appearance (*Inferno* 1:79–87). At the same time, Dante highlights the limits of Virgil's classical reason

through his limited capacity as guide (*Inferno* 1:121–122) and his ignorance of the Cross (*Inferno* 23:124–126). Statius' conversion through Virgil's works carries a similar barb. The emptiness of Virgil's body in *Purgatorio* 21 is particularly noticeable in the context of *Purgatorio* 21 and 22, where references to Virgilian texts suggest that Virgil's words had assumed the shape of a corporeal presence for Statius, as if the poet were physically present, directing and changing Statius' course in life. Statius recalls that in his reading of the *Aeneid* Virgil's words "called" out to him:

“E se non fosse ch'io drizzai mia cura,
quand'io intesi là dove tu chiami,
crucciato quasi a l'umana natura:
‘Per che non reggi tu, o sacra fame
de l'oro, l'appetito de' mortali?’
voltando sentirei le giostre grame.” (*Purgatorio* 22:37–42)

[“And were it not that I set right my care, when I gave heed to the lines where you exclaim, angered as it were against human nature: ‘To what do you not drive the appetite of mortals, O accursed hunger of gold?’ at the rolling I should feel the grievous jousts.”]

The kind of bearing the Virgilian texts have upon Statius' life contrasts sharply with the lack of substance in Virgil's shade-person. The significance of this ties in with how the *Aeneid* and the *Fourth Eclogue* are resurrected as Dantean texts. Through an emptying-out of the author Virgil's intention and a filling-up with Dante's exegesis, Virgil's texts gain new bodies as Christian texts, promulgating godliness, evangelizing readers like Dante's Statius.⁴⁶

Dante's re-working of the *Aeneid* in the aspect of embodiment seems to pointedly suggest the better *corpus* of the *Commedia*. Virgil's representation of the afterlife in *Aeneid* 6 has been identified as a key model for Dante's poetic creation of the otherworld.⁴⁷ The emphasis on corporeality for the distinction of human persons and ghosts is another important lesson Dante took from Virgil; the failed embraces in the *Commedia* are mirror-images of the failed embraces in the *Aeneid*.⁴⁸ Etienne Gilson observes that Dante's account of the shade-body through Statius in *Purgatorio* 25 imitates Anchises' lecture on the nature of spirits to Aeneas in *Aeneid* 6:724–51.⁴⁹ What needs to be borne in mind is that Dante's shade-bodies and the souls in the Virgilian underworld, in spite of appearances, are

fundamentally different: Dante's shades in Purgatory and Paradise can look forward to rising again on Judgment Day as real bodies; Virgil's shades will be forever ghostly. This parallels Dante's sense that the *Commedia* is a body of truth, whereas the *Aeneid*, lacking hope, faith and grace, is not. The inverse mirroring of the Incarnation by the pilgrim's situation in the otherworld suggests Dante's claim for the special body that is his poem. The peculiarity of Dante's human person in the otherworld suggests that his situation is an exact inverse of that of Christ on earth: the poet-protagonist is the only human body in the otherworldly realms of shades and souls, just as Christ 'born, not of blood . . . but of God . . . was made flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14).⁵⁰ Parallels with Christ crop up on a number of other occasions. There is a Christological parallel in the time-span of the poet-protagonist's journey: Good Friday to Easter Sunday. In the *Commedia*, Virgil responds to the pilgrim's query about his body's lack of a shadow with a reference to the mystery of the Incarnation (*Purgatorio* 3:31–45)—a move which is significant not only in its highlighting of the poets' Christian / pagan divide; it also directly relates that divide to their difference as real body and mere shadow and it implies the kinship of the pilgrim's person and body with that of Christ.



Another embodied sense by which Dante asserts his difference and singularity can be found in the mobility of the protagonist. In *Inferno* 4 Dante is distinct from the *auctores* as the pilgrim on his journey toward God. The fact that the protagonist is a pilgrim bears particular significance in the context of his relations with other poets. Unlike them, he is not consigned to a permanent place in the otherworld, which means that he is, as yet, free from the judgment embodied by its geography. The situation is similar in *Purgatorio* where Dante is set apart from Statius, Sordello and Guinizzelli as one whose presence is divinely enabled. In the pilgrim's self-description to Sordello this is brought out through the use of verbs for coming and going:

“Oh !” diss’ io lui “per entro i luoghi tristi
venni stamane, e sono in prima vita,
ancor che l’altra, sì *andando*, acquisti.” (*Purgatorio* 8:58–60)

[“Oh,” I said to him “from within the woeful places I came this morning, and I am in my first life, albeit by this my journeying I gain the other.”] (*italics mine*)

Virgil introduces him to Statius as one whose movement in the other-world has not only been divinely ordained, but is even capable of getting the higher powers to grant Virgil temporary discharge from Limbo and permission to climb Mount Purgatory:

l'anima sua, ch'è tua e mia serocchia,
venendo sù, non potea venir sola,
però ch'al nostro modo non adocchia.
Ond' io fui tratto fuor de l'ampia gola
d'inferno per mostrarli . . . (*Purgatorio* 21:28–32)

[his soul, which is your sister and mine, could not make the ascent alone, because it sees not after our fashion. Wherefore I was brought forth from Hell's wide jaws to guide him . . .] (*italics mine*)

Likewise in the poet-protagonist's meeting with Guinizzelli, the former's special status is conveyed by his divinely sanctioned movement, up Mount Purgatory and up to Heaven:

Or se tu hai sì ampio privilegio,
che licito ti sia l'*andare* al chiostro
nel quale è Cristo abate del collegio . . . (*Purgatorio* 26:127–129)

[Now, if you have such ample privilege that you are permitted to go to the cloister wherein Christ is abbot of the college . . .] (*italics mine*)

The most pathetic contrast resides, as in the case of corporeality, with Virgil. Virgil's situation in Dante's cosmos is utterly desolate. In *Purgatorio* 21 and 22 Virgil's tragic circumstances are highlighted by the contrast with Dante's and Statius' blessedness. Present as a semi-fictional creation, Statius' contrast with Virgil reinforces that of Dante with Virgil.⁵¹ In reply to Statius' greeting, Virgil goes straight to the point about the distinction between them:

. . . "Nel beato concilio
ti ponga in pace la verace corte
che me rilega nell'eterno essilio." (*Purgatorio* 21:16–18)

[. . . "May the true court which binds me in the eternal exile bring you in peace to the assembly of the blest."]

Virgil's banishment from God conveys his difference from Dante in terms of place or in this case, Virgil's out-of-place-ness in the Christian universe. Once begun, the protagonist's journey initiates the end of his exile from God's community. It is a journey which Virgil, as one of the shades damned "nell'eterno essilio" [(to) the eternal exile] (*Inferno* 23:126; *Purgatorio* 21:18), will never make. Significantly, the phrase is echoed in the lines describing Virgil's surprise and bewilderment at the crucifixion of Caiaphas and his followers in *Inferno* 23:121–126; the echo subtly reminds the reader that Virgil shares the same plight of "eterno essilio" with the likes of Caiaphas. The contrast between pilgrim and guide is made repeatedly during Dante's journey with Virgil in Hell and Purgatory with an increased emphasis on the mountain. Although Virgil's inadequacy as guide is a gradually deepening impression from *Inferno*, it is in *Purgatorio* that this impression is confirmed: Virgil seems as unsure of the way ahead as the protagonist. This creates an impression of his diminishing authority. As with his lack of a stable body, Virgil's exile reflects his ontologically precarious presence. This points in turn to a logic of ontological difference in the underpinning of the *Commedia*, pertaining not only to the poets but to all the characters.

In the *Commedia* exile can denote either or both political and spiritual states of being. The word "essilio" occurs six times in the poem. Two of these bear political rather than religious significance. They occur in *Paradiso* 10 and 17, both references to Dante's own exile, the former through a reference to Boethius.⁵² It is revealing that exile should occur in its designation of political status only in the last canticle as Dante neared the end of his writing of the poem. These instances hint at a mounting distress in the poet. In *Paradiso* Dante's fictional self, as protagonist, is coming close to the end of his journey of homecoming to God, but the growing proximity of his happy ending comes into poignant juxtaposition with Dante's banishment from his home in Florence. That Dante should employ "exile" in its political sense on two occasions in the *Paradiso*, where previously it had evoked the state of one who is outcast from God's kingdom, severed from God's love, is significant because these instances suggest a growing sensitivity on the part of the poet towards the widening disparity between his personal circumstance and that of his protagonist. The poem ends with the resolution of the protagonist's spiritual crisis. On that level Dante's exile is brought to an end. But the poet who wrote that conclusion died without changing his status as exile. The homecoming of

Dante as Christian is witnessed in the last canticle with his reconciliation with God and God's community in Heaven. But the political hope, Dante's return home to Florence, was never realized.

The pilgrim's attainment of spiritual redemption at the climax of his journey that is also its end reflects Dante's hope for political recovery as *the* fitting end and climax to the constant journeying he had to endure while writing the *Commedia*. This is part of a fiction of eventuality in the poem. Whenever it is expressed, Dante's sense of his poetic achievement and his place in tradition has an air of eventuality about it. This comes from his idea of the predestination of his role as vatic poet. But the foretold absolute would have still been subject to contingency and attendant uncertainties. Predestination is an important component of Dante's self-belief; it may also be viewed as a reflection of his vulnerability. Literary history is represented as part of a divine plan, working distinctly to Dante's advantage. In the *Vita nuova*, we catch a glimpse of this in the analogy Dante draws between his succession to Cavalcanti (drawn by proxy through their ladies Giovanna and Beatrice) and Christ being born after John the Baptist. The personified figure of Love explains to Dante Giovanna's appointment as Beatrice's precursor:

Quella prima è nominata Primavera solo per questa venuta d'oggi; ché io mossi lo imponente del nome a chiamarla così Primavera, cioè prima verrà lo die che Beatrice si mosterrà dopo la imaginazione del suo fedele.

["She that came first was called Spring, only because of that which was to happen on this day. And it was I myself who caused that name to be given her; seeing that as the Spring cometh first in the year, so should she come first on this day, when Beatrice was to show herself after the vision of her servant."]

Dante's presentiment of Beatrice's death precedes this episode, and the two act in combination as prefiguration of Beatrice's "return" in the *Commedia*. The bridging of the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia* from the point of view of Beatrice's featuring in both works is called to mind in association with Dante's claim to a higher poetic rank than Cavalcanti and the corroboration of this by fate. Dante's predicted eclipsing of Cavalcanti is also found in the *Commedia*:

Credette Cimabue ne la pintura
tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido,
sì che la fama di colui è scura:

Così ha tolto l'uno a l'altro Guido
la gloria de la lingua; e forse è nato
chi l'uno e l'altro caccerà del nido. (*Purgatorio* 11:94–99)

[Cimabue thought to hold the field in painting, and now Giotto has the cry, so that the other's fame is dim; so has the one Guido taken from the other the glory of our tongue— and he perchance is born that shall chase the one and the other from the nest.]

The succession of one Guido to the other's place refers to the lineage of Cavalcanti and Guinizzelli. Dante's mention of a third unnamed poet who will surpass the achievement of the two Guidos is commonly read as self-referential, an ambitious claim moderated by the admission of probability in the word "forse", "perhaps".

The way in which Dante fits other poets into his cosmos embodies his poetic ambition. Looking at this from another perspective, we can see this as an indication of his rawness, as a measure of his defensiveness. As I have said above, Dante asserts himself in ways in which he felt most bereft. What makes this extraordinary is that he presents his case as if it were objective fact and not a self-orchestrated fiction. The *Commedia* is not the Bible, nor does it make such a claim; still, the poem does present as the jurisdiction of the Absolute what are, in fact, the results of subjective thought and feeling, the opinions and beliefs of one who was as human and fallible as those he judged.⁵³ This seems even more extraordinary in Dante's embodiment of tradition, since the poets who appear have been specially selected as representatives of tradition; but they also appear according to how they have been judged by Dante's system of Christian law and ethics. While poetry is recognizably that which unites the poets, aesthetic concerns seem to be overarched by the poem's Christian message. Dante situates his community of poets within the hard and unremitting structure of Christian justice he designed himself. The plight of the pagan authors in *Inferno* 4 is a particular case in point. In relation to this, we have another point which cannot be overstated: that is, that Dante's system is presented as unquestionably objective when it is in fact subjective. A comparison of the embrace episode involving Virgil and Statius with that of Virgil and Sordello shows that some causes for identity are allowed expression while others are not. This is traceable to the priority of the cause for identity, a priority decided by Dante. Dante allows Virgil and Sordello to embrace because the gesture communicates first and foremost their sense of community and patriotic feeling as fellow Mantuans.

The embrace “exemplified political unity”.⁵⁴ Dante’s patriotism is well known; but on this occasion the characteristic is emphasized, for it seems to be the only feasible cause for the bending of otherwise irrevocable laws. It is also notable that the interim between Virgil’s and Sordello’s two embraces is filled by Dante’s invective against the unpatriotic actions of his contemporaries in Florence.

Dante’s treatment of tradition in terms of corporeality and place evokes a portrait of his self-affirmation through a narrative of actual relationships with other poets, particularly Virgil. But if this is a portrait of poetic ambition, it is also one of political hope. Dante’s claim for a place in tradition is intertwined with his desperate bid for an end to banishment; his poetics of embodiment show this. Dante’s book image in the final canto of the *Commedia* is a reflexive moment:

Nel suo profondo vidi che s’interna,
legato con amore in un volume,
ciò che per l’universo si squaderna:
sustanze e accidenti e lor costume,
quasi conflati insieme, per tal modo
che ciò ch’i’ dico è un semplice lume. (*Paradiso* 33:85–90)

[In its depth I saw ingathered, bound by love in one single volume, that which is dispersed in leaves throughout the universe: substances and accidents and their relations, as though fused together in such a way that what I tell is but a simple light.]

Dante has arrived at the end of his pilgrimage, and he looks into the eternal light of God to see, at the heart of everything, the image of a book. The moment coincides with the poem’s conclusion, the drawing to a close of the pilgrim’s time in the otherworld. The pronouncement that all things of the world are exhaustively encompassed by God’s Text is occasioned by the wrapping up of Dante’s own text. The concomitance is not mere coincidence: if these lines are self-referential, they also evoke Dante’s poetic self-confidence.⁵⁵ The claim for his “volume” is made against Virgil, the only poet whose work warrants the same description as “volume” (*Inferno* 1:84) [the other Artist being God [*Paradiso* 30:86]]. Dante’s positioning of these references in the first and last cantos of the *Commedia* suggests that they hold the poem snugly between them, like book-ends; the same *volume* Dante’s readers find themselves holding in

their hands. The bookbinding imagery of the tercets evokes the binding of the world by God's love, and it suggests Dante's hope that his poem too, disseminated during his lifetime as leaves of notebooks, would be bound into a whole by its readers' love.⁵⁶ In the same way, the resurrection and reunion of other poets, artists, and their works testify to Dante's readerly love toward them. The approach towards texts as bodies of truth, beauty, and wisdom evokes the poet's belief in sustaining "life relations" with them; embodiment in the *Commedia* encourages the reader to do the same.⁵⁷ The pilgrim's unique body and place is as much a fruit of poetic consciousness as it acts as a balm for the homeless poet. It is a self-actualizing fiction: undeniably, Dante's bold imagination of the otherworld has secured his poem's place forever in the world.

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TRANSLATIONS

The following translations were used throughout:

Statius, *Thebaid*, translated by A. D. Melville, with introduction and notes by D. W. T. Vessey, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*, translated with commentary by Charles S. Singleton, 3 vols. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series: 1970–1975, corrected ed. 1977). (All Italian and English quotations from the *Commedia* are from this edition).

NOTES

1. On the depiction of souls as individuals in medieval vision literature, including the *Commedia*, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 294–309. My essay is indebted to this excellent book.

2. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Faith Imagining the Self: Somatomorphic Soul and Resurrection Body in Dante's *Divine Comedy*", in *Faithful Imagining: Essays in Honour of Richard R. Niebuhr*, ed. by Albert Blackwell, Wayne Proudfoot, and Sang Hyun Lee (Atlanta: Scholars' Press, 1995), 83. The essay can also be found in chapter 7 of *The Resurrection Body*.

3. Bynum, *The Resurrection Body*.

4. For a study that shows how Beatrice's fleshly person embodies her significance to the poet, see Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Body of Beatrice* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

5. Apart from the two aforementioned titles by Bynum, see Etienne Gilson, "Dante's Notion of a Shade: *Purgatorio* 25," *Mediaeval Studies* 29 (1967), 124–42; John Freccero, "Manfred's Wounds and the Poetics of the *Purgatorio*," in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), 195–208; Rachel Jacoff, "Our Bodies, Our Selves: The Body in the *Commedia*," in *Sparks and Seeds: Medieval Literature and its Afterlife. Essays in Honour of John Freccero*, ed. by Dana E. Stewart and Alison Cornish (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000), 119–37.
6. For Dante's appropriation and "misreading" of Virgilian texts, see Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey T. Schnapp, eds., *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's "Commedia"* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).
7. Randolph Starn, *Contrary Commonwealth: the Theme of Exile in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 60–61.
8. Starn, 6.
9. Starn, 5.
10. Robert Edwards, "Exile, Self, and Society," in *Exile in Literature*, ed. by Maria-Inés Lagos-Pope (Lewisburg and London: Associated University Presses, 1988), 16.
11. Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 179.
12. Starn, 29.
13. Edwards, 19–20.
14. "Introduction," in *De Vulgari Eloquentia: Dante's Book of Exile*, translated by Marianne Shapiro (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 1–2.
15. For a study of exile as more than simply a theme, that is, as precondition for the poet's critical judgment and as a figure for his philosophical self-inquiry through poetry, see Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Dante and the Virtues of Exile," in *Exile in Literature*, 49–71.
16. Jorge Luis Borges, *Seven Nights*, translated by Eliot Weinberger (New York: New Directions, 1984), 10.
17. Helen Vendler, *The Breaking of Style: Hopkins, Heaney, Graham* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1.
18. Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the "Comedy"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 3–84.
19. Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 14.
20. Scarry, 23.
21. Scarry, 22.
22. Scarry, 23.
23. Bynum, "Faith Imagining the Self," 84. See also chapter 6, *The Resurrection Body*.
24. Bynum, "Faith Imagining the Self," 97.
25. Bynum, "Faith Imagining the Self," 89.
26. Dante's audacity in imagining a somatomorphic soul in the afterlife is shown brilliantly through a comparison of his work with the first works of visual art influenced by it in the fourteenth century. See "Faith Imagining the Self," 87–88.
27. "Faith Imagining the Self," 104.
28. Freccero, "Manfred's Wounds and the Poetics of the *Purgatorio*," 200.
29. Charles Singleton, *Commentary to the "Divine Comedy"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 513–514.
30. Whether Juvenal's reference is complimentary or a case of "embittered irony" has been debated by scholars. See Statius, *Thebaid*, translated by A. D. Melville with an introduction and notes by D. W. T. Vessey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 7. This is the English translation used here for subsequent references to the *Thebaid*.
31. Rebecca West, "On the Sense of Touch in the *Divine Comedy*," *Lectura Dantis* (Fall 1989), 46–59 (55).
32. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, translated by Willard R. Trask (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 48–54. First published as *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* in 1953.

33. In the *Convivio* Dante cites a larger group of classical poets than in the *Vita nuova* and *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. Dante's "heightened awareness of antiquity" shows that he begins to see the *auctores* as "providers of ethical insights as well as rhetorical precepts." See Barolini, *Dante's Poets*, 190–191.

34. John Ahern, "Binding the Book: Hermeneutics and Manuscript Production in *Paradiso* 33," *PMLA* 97 (1982), 800–809. Dante released his poem in *quadernetti* of six to eight cantos over ten to seventeen years. Ahern cites Boccaccio as source (800; 805–806n).

35. For the conventional incorporation of rank and status in representations of the afterlife, see "Faith Imagining the Self," 94–95.

36. Due to lack of space, I will not deal with Dante's failure to embrace Casella. It is, however, relevant to note that the episode is modelled on two incidents in Books 2 and 6 of the *Aeneid*. See Robert Hollander, "Purgatorio II: Cato's Rebuke and Dante's *scoglio*," in *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1980), 91–105; John Freccero, "Casella's Song," *Dante Studies* 91 (1973), 73–80.

37. George D. Economou, "Saying Spirit in Terms of Matter: the Epic Embrace in Medieval Poetic Imagination," *Lectura Dantis*, 11 (Fall 1992), 72–79 (76).

38. Nicolae Iliescu, "Gli episodi degli abbracci nelle strutture del *Purgatorio*," *Yearbook of Italian Studies* 1 (1971), 57.

39. Kenelm Foster, *The Two Dantes and Other Studies* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977), 42.

40. Bynum highlights Dante's representation of desire for the risen body. See "Faith Imagining the Self," 101–103.

41. See Barolini, *Dante's Poets*, 188–269; Jacoff and Schnapp, eds., *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's 'Commedia'*; Kirkpatrick, *Dante's 'Inferno': Difficulty and Dead Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Robert Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco: tragedia nella 'Commedia'* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1983).

42. For further examples, see *Inferno* 8:43; *Inferno* 19:121–132; *Purgatorio* 16:8–9.

43. For instances of bodily protection by Virgil, see *Inferno* 19:34–46; *Inferno* 24:22–24; *Purgatorio* 14:140–141.

44. Robin Kirkpatrick, *Dante's 'Inferno': Difficulty and Dead Poetry*; "Virgilio", in Marianne Shapiro, *Dante and the Knot of Body and Soul* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1998), 87–109; Rebecca West, "On the Sense of Touch in the *Divine Comedy*," *Lectura Dantis*, 5 (Fall 1989), 49–52.

45. The Godly desire for the resurrection body is articulated by St. Benedict in *Paradiso* 22:65–67.

46. See William Franke, "Resurrected Tradition and Revealed Truth: Dante's *Statius*," *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 15 (1994), 7–34.

47. Gilson, "Dante's Notion of a Shade: *Purgatorio* 25"; Shapiro, *Dante and the Knot of Body and Soul*, xii.

48. Dante's failed embrace with Casella mirrors Aeneas' unsuccessful attempt to embrace the ghost of his wife Creusa in Book 2 of the *Aeneid*. Statius' keen desire to embrace Virgil follows the pattern set by Aeneas in Book 6 where his joy at seeing Anchises overwhelms reason and he forgets that his father is no longer an earthly fleshly being. The difference between his own solidity and the ghostliness of the inhabitants of Hades is impressed upon Aeneas from the time he enters the underworld: he would have slain the monsters who greet him — Chimaera, Gorgons, Harpies, Geryon—if his companion had not cautioned him that they have no body.

49. Gilson, 140.

50. Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the 'Divine Comedy'*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 192–226. Mazzotta interprets Dante's description of his poetic practice in his dialogue with Bonagiunta (*Purgatorio* 24:52–54) as the making of a theological claim for his poetry through an analogy with the Incarnation. He argues that Dante was influenced by the Augustinian conception of "human language [as] the immanent analogue of the Incarnation" (203). Mazzotta cites several Augustinian texts, among them *De Trinitate*, xv, ii: "For just as our word in some way becomes a bodily sound by assuming that in which it may be manifested to the senses

of men, so the Word of God was made flesh by assuming that in which He might also be manifested to the senses of man." (203n).

51. Barolini, *Dante's Poets*, 256–269.

52. Dante was greatly sympathetic to Boethius, as might be inferred from the many references to Boethius in his writings; for instance in *Convivio* 2 he tells us that he read the *De consolazione philosophiae* for comfort. Dante's appreciation of Boethius is typical of his time: Boethius was highly regarded as a Christian martyr in the Middle Ages. We may see that the special significance Boethius held for Dante relates to their similar suffering of political injustice. Dante introduces Boethius in the heaven of the Christian philosophers as "l'anima santa" [the holy soul] (*Paradiso* 10:125) and the passage of his description echoes Dante's account of his own plight as exile through Cacciaguida seven cantos later.

53. See Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert*. Mazzotta argues that, throughout the *Commedia*, we see "the radical predicament of a Christian poet who seeks more than an esthetic humanistic redemption and less than to perform the supreme transgression of writing an appendix to the Bible." (208).

54. Barolini, *Dante's Poets*, 161.

55. Ahern cites Philippe Sollers as probably the first critic to see self-referentiality in these lines. See Ahern, 802; 800n.

56. See Ahern, 800–801.

57. E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 311: "The use of writing and the book in figurative language occurs in all periods of world literature, but with characteristic differences which are determined by the course of culture in general. Not every subject matter, that is, can be employed by figurative language, but only such as are value-charged; which, as Goethe puts it, are 'life relations' or through which the 'interdependent life of earthly things' is discernible."

“What is Truth?” The Architecture of the Early Chapters of *Convivio*, IV

STEPHEN BEMROSE

THE *Convivio*'s fourth book is largely concerned with the origin and nature of human nobility, which Dante in the opening chapter calls “l'umana bontade in quanto in noi è da la natura seminata” (*Convivio* IV. i. 7). This is an area, says Dante, in which error is rife, and very dangerous error at that: for a wrong conception of nobility leads to false judgments as to the worth of others and thence to injustice in our dealings with them, such that the good are despised and the wicked exalted (§7). Before making clear his own position—and there is a wealth of historical, political and ethical matter before we reach that point—Dante seeks to refute the erroneous views of others. *Convivio* IV. iii sets forth two such views: the opinion of Emperor Frederick II, and that of the common people, the *gente volgare*, which is “d'ogni ragione ignuda” (§5). The Emperor held nobility to be a combination of long-established wealth (that is, material riches—*antica ricchezza*) and pleasant manners (*belli costumi*).¹ Another unnamed person, less gifted intellectually than Frederick (*di più lieve sapere*), left out the manners, and so considered nobility from a purely socio-economic angle. This latter view, says Dante, is held by nearly everyone (“questa oppinione è quasi di tutti”), and he immediately adds, with vehement scorn, that “quasi tutti così latrano” (*latrano* meaning literally “bark” or “howl”—§8). The implication is that mass opinion on this point is not just devoid of all reason, but bestial, sub-human.² Dante of course will reject both this view and the Emperor's, but in doing so he considers himself in two respects to be running counter to authority, something which would seem to lend very strong support (“due gravissime ragioni”—§9) to his opponents. Not only is there the

imperial authority of Frederick to be considered; there is also that of Aristotle himself. The vast majority, according to Dante, subscribe to a fallacious notion of nobility, yet the Philosopher says that what the majority believe cannot be wholly false: “dice lo Filosofo che quello che pare a li più, impossibile è del tutto essere falso” (§9). It is with the implications of this apparent conflict with Aristotle that the present study is chiefly concerned.

But does Aristotle ever say such a thing, and if so, where? It is by no means clear which passage(s) Dante may have had in mind, if indeed he is referring to Aristotle himself, as distinct from one of the commentators. Most *Convivio* editions refer to Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here, in the context of a discussion not of knowledge or opinion, but of pleasure and its relation to happiness, Aristotle asserts that the fact that all creatures, men and beasts alike, pursue pleasure is some indication that it is in some sense the chief good (*Ethics* VII. xiii 5; 1153b 25–28). In the translation by (probably) William of Moerbeke (used by Aquinas and familiar to Dante) this reads: “Et prosequi autem omnia, et bestias, et homines delectationem, signum quoddam eius, quod est esse aliquialiter optimum ipsam.”³ Apparently by way of illustration, Aristotle then quotes a proverb, part of a couplet from Hesiod⁴ in fact: “Fama autem non omnino perditur quam populi multi famant” [“No rumor spread by many peoples is entirely lost”]. Now this is not particularly close to what Dante claims Aristotle held about majority opinion, and editors of the *Convivio* from Flamini onwards have rightly suggested that Dante was more likely to have had Aquinas’ commentary in mind. In fact St Thomas says at this point:

Et dicit, quod hoc quod omnes prosequuntur, idest quaerunt delectationem, est quoddam signum quod aliquialiter delectatio sit optimum. Illud enim in quod omnes vel plures consentiunt, non potest esse omnino falsum. Unde in proverbio dicitur, etc. [“And he says that the fact that what all pursue or seek is pleasure, is some indication that pleasure is in some sense the chief good. For what all or many concur in, cannot be entirely false. Hence in the proverb it says,” etc.] (*Ethics* VII, lectio XIII, n. 1509; p. 401a).

At first sight “Illud enim in quod omnes . . .” does seem close to Dante’s phrase in *Convivio* IV. iii. 9; yet St Thomas goes on to explain this with reference to the operations of nature. Generally speaking nature does not fail, and what is found in all or most creatures (including the pursuit of

pleasure) results from an *inclinatio naturae*, which does not tend to what is evil or false:

Et huius ratio est, quia natura non deficit, neque in omnibus neque in pluribus, sed solum in paucioribus. Unde id quod invenitur in omnibus aut in pluribus, videtur esse ex inclinatione naturae, quae non inclinat neque ad malum neque ad falsum. Et sic videtur, quod delectatio, in quam concurrit omnium appetitus, sit aliquid optimum ["And the reason for this is that nature does not fail, neither in all cases nor in most, but only in a few instances. Hence what is found in all or most cases is clearly the result of an inclination of nature, which does not incline towards what is evil, nor towards what is false. And thus it can be seen that pleasure, which is the common goal of everyone's desire, is in some sense the chief good."].

There is nothing here about the veracity or falsity of popular opinion.

In Book X of the *Ethics* Aristotle returns to the relation between pleasure and happiness. In Chapter ii, whilst not endorsing the view of Eudoxus, for whom pleasure was the chief good, he nonetheless has no time for those critics of Eudoxus who absurdly deny that what all desire could be good: if they undermine our confidence in such a matter, why should we give credence to anything else they assert (*Ethics* X. ii. 4; 1172b36–1173a2)? The Latin version at this point runs thus:

Instantes autem, quod non bonum, quod omnia appetunt, nihil dicunt. Quod enim omnibus videtur, hoc esse aimus; interimens autem hanc fidem, non omnino credibilia dicit ["Now they who insist that what all desire is not good, speak empty words. For what is plain to everyone, that we affirm (as true); so someone who undermines our belief in this will surely not say anything (else) that is more credible."] (n. 1423; p. 514b).

St Thomas' gloss (mentioned in both the Busnelli-Vandelli and the Vasoli editions of the *Convivio*) again brings in the principle that nature (here *iudicium naturale*, rather than *inclinatio naturae*) cannot be at fault in all things:

Illud enim quod videtur omnibus dicimus ita se habere; et hoc habetur quasi principium. Quia non est possibile quod naturale iudicium in omnibus fallatur. Cum autem appetitus non sit nisi eius quod videtur bonum, id quod ab omnibus appetitur omnibus videtur bonum. Et sic delectatio quae ab omnibus appetitur est bona ["For we say that what is plain to everyone is so; and it is so intrinsically. For it is not possible for natural judgment to be at fault in everything. Now since

desire is only for what is seen as good, that which is desired by all is plainly good for all. And so pleasure, which is desired by all, is good.”] (*Ethics* X, lectio II, n. 1975; p. 516a).

Again, neither Aristotle nor St Thomas is concerned here with popular opinion. However, another phrase in Aquinas’ *Ethics* commentary is much closer than this to Dante, and at least as close as “Illud enim in quod omnes . . .” (n. 1509). In Book I, chapter xi, following on from a remark attributed to Solon⁵ (discussed in the preceding chapter), Aristotle considers the question of whether the happiness of the dead might in some sense be influenced by the fortunes of their descendants and friends. To deny this entirely, he says, seems too heartless a doctrine, and contrary to accepted beliefs (*Ethics* I, xi, 1; 1101a 23–24). In the Latin version: “Pronepotum autem fortunas et amicorum omnium nequaquam quidem conferre, valde inamicabile videtur, et opinionibus contrarium” [“To hold that the fortunes of all their descendants (*lit.* “great-grandsons”) and friends bestow nothing at all (on the dead) seems excessively unkind, and contrary to (common) beliefs.”] (n. 124; p. 54a). St Thomas’ gloss expands the words “et opinionibus contrarium” in a manner that brings it close to Dante’s phrase in *Convivio* IV. iii. 9: “quia hoc esset contrarium opinioni communi, quae non potest totaliter esse falsa” [“for that would be contrary to the common belief, which cannot be entirely false.”] (*Ethics* I, lectio XVII, n. 203; p. 54b). Note that Aristotle’s text, notwithstanding Aquinas’ addition, does not in fact assert that what is generally believed cannot be entirely wrong.

Now although this last text does mention commonly-held beliefs, it is not about the nature of such beliefs; and the passages in Books VII and X are not epistemological at all, but essentially ethical. This emerges very clearly in St Thomas’ commentary: his *iudicium naturale*, no less than his *inclinatio naturae*, has to do with an innate *appetitus*, not with judgment. Certainly it is not the same kind of thing as a rational judgment as to the truth or falsehood of a particular proposition. St Thomas’ exegeses are in fact an application of the fundamental Aristotelian idea that nature can fail only in a minority of instances: in the (vast) majority of cases it will be successful, and indeed it will always incline to the good and the right, never to evil or falsehood. More simply and succinctly, this is the “nil otiose” or “nil frustra” principle, a commonplace of mediaeval thought, and very familiar to Dante.⁶

However, Dante scholars have linked two other *Ethics* passages (both from Book I) with *Convivio*, IV. iii. 9. Moore, in his famous catalogue of Dante's classical quotations and allusions, draws attention to *Ethics* I. viii. 7 (1098b26–29),⁷ where Aristotle notes the variety of views that have been held concerning happiness. Some have been held by many people, and for a long time; others by a few outstanding individuals. In neither case are *all* such views likely to be wrong:

Horum autem hoc et quidem multi et veteres dicunt. Hoc autem pauci et gloriosi viri. Neutros autem horum rationabile peccare in universis, sed et unum aliquid, vel plura dirigere ["Now certainly many people assert some of these views, and have done so for a long time. Other views are asserted by a few illustrious men. It is not reasonable to hold that in either case such views are entirely erroneous; but some or many may reasonably be said to be accurate."] (n. 87; p. 38b).

So it is probable then that some (many, indeed) of these conceptions of happiness may be true. But to say this is of course quite different—irreducibly different—from saying that one particular concept, because it is adhered to by many, cannot be wholly erroneous. The Busnelli-Vandelli edition brings in St Thomas' gloss on a slightly earlier passage⁸ (*Ethics* I, viii, 1; 1098b11–12), where Aristotle says: "Vero quidem enim omnia consonant existentia. Falso autem cito dissonat verum" ["For indeed all things are in harmony with (i.e. they confirm) a true proposition, whereas the truth soon clashes with a false one"] (n. 81; p. 38a). Aquinas expatiates on the first part of this elliptical assertion in a strikingly metaphysical (not epistemological) way, grounded in his fundamental conviction that even something evil is not utterly bereft of good (the ultimate reason for this, though it is not stated here, is that it is good in so far as it exists):

Non autem invenitur aliquod malum in quo totaliter sit bonum corruptum, ut dicitur in quarto huius,⁹ et ideo omnia concordant bono non solum bona, sed etiam mala, secundum hoc, quod aliquid retinent de bono. Et similiter [and here St Thomas shifts the focus from the evil-good relationship to that between falsehood and truth] omnia falsa concordant vero, inquantum aliquid retinent de similitudine veritatis. Non enim est possibile, quod intellectus opinantis aliquod falsum totaliter privetur cognitione veritatis ["Now we do not find any evil thing in which the good is wholly destroyed, as it says in Book IV of this work, and therefore all things concord with the good—not only good things, but evil ones too—in that they retain something of the good. And similarly all false views concord with the true one, in as much as they retain some semblance of the

truth. For it is not possible that the mind of someone holding some false opinion is wholly deprived of the knowledge of truth.”] (*Ethics* I, lectio XII, n. 140; p. 38a–b).

This does not, I think, mean that even false beliefs contain a kernel of truth, but simply that someone who is in error is not thereby entirely ignorant of what truth is (or *that* truth exists). Be that as it may, St Thomas’ comment seems to go considerably beyond what is stated (or even implied) in Aristotle’s text, and certainly throws no light on Dante’s assertion about the Philosopher’s view of mass opinion.

What of other Aristotelian texts? Vasoli observes (p. 609) that Nardi¹⁰ cited the opening words of the *De divinatione per somnum* (I; 462b 12–17). Here Aristotle says: “As for prophecy which takes place in sleep and which is said to proceed from dreams, it is not an easy matter either to despise it or to believe in it. The fact that all, or at least many, suppose that dreams have a significance inclines one to believe the theory, as based on experience . . .”¹¹ This cautious preamble is not very close to Dante’s words in *Convivio* IV, but Nardi brings in a commentator who is closer. Not St Thomas this time but (typically for Nardi) Averroes, whose paraphrase of the *De divinatione* declares that: “ea quae sunt famosa apud omnes, aut sunt necessaria secundum totum, aut secundum partem; impossibile enim est ut famosum sit falsum secundum totum” [“those things widely held by all, are either wholly necessary, or partially so; for it is impossible that what is widely held should be wholly false.”]¹² (Nardi also mentions a phrase from Averroes’ *Commentarium Magnum* on the *De anima*: “. . . probabilia enim impossibile est ut sint falsa secundum totum” [“. . . for it is impossible for plausible things to be wholly false.”])¹³ Again, it is the commentator, not the Philosopher himself, who may provide a parallel to Dante. In fact none of the Aristotelian passages so far examined, bearing in mind their context as well as their content, is broadly, let alone strictly, *à propos*.

Aristotle does, however, consider directly the status of mass opinion, in an uncompromising statement in the *Eudemian Ethics*, whose import is very different from what is suggested in *Convivio*, IV. Here the subject under discussion is happiness, concerning which we are told that: “Similarly, neither need we examine the views of the many; they speak in an unreflective way on almost any topic, most of all when they speak about this . . .” (*Eudemian Ethics* I, iii; 1215a 1–2).¹⁴ The immediate context here

strikingly reinforces the point: Aristotle has just dismissed as unworthy of consideration the opinions of children, the sick and the insane! This passage has not been adduced by way of contrast in editions of the *Convivio*, no doubt for the good reason that the *Eudemian Ethics* had not yet been translated in Dante's time.¹⁵ Nonetheless, I have thought it worthwhile to bring it in, my contention being that Aristotle did not assert the proposition attributed to him in *Convivio*, IV—a proposition that, at least if taken narrowly, seems little short of preposterous. As for Dante himself, it cannot be emphasized too strongly how opposed he is to a view of mass opinion as being *per se* true, or likely to be so. Two passages in the *Commedia* may be mentioned here. In the Heaven of the Moon, Beatrice explains that in ancient times astral influence was so widely misunderstood that *almost* the whole world (the Jews being an implied exception) was wrongly led to divinize the planets (*Par.* 4. 61–63). And in the *Purgatorio* Marco Lombardo deplores the fact that the world is blind as to the true action and limits of stellar influence. This influence may indeed affect the majority of our inclinations, but in no way does it determine our actions. If it did, our free will would be undermined (*Purg.* 16. 65–81). Even on such a crucial question as this (and belief in the freedom of the will is fundamental for Dante) popular opinion is wrong. So it is with the nobility: we have seen how Dante scorns the most widely held view on this vital matter as bestial, unworthy of human beings. Not that its popularity has any bearing on its veracity: elsewhere in the *Convivio* Dante condemns even more vehemently a grievous error concerning the immortality of the human soul. To deny this is "intra tutte le bestialitati . . . stoltissima, vilissima e dannosissima" (II. viii. 8). But since, as Dante then asserts, belief in the afterlife is common to all philosophies and creeds, the implication is that to deny it is rare. The point is that these errors concerning nobility and the soul are both condemned as very wrong (though only the latter is damnable): it does not matter how many or how few hold them.

The alleged conflict with Aristotle in *Convivio*, IV is a conflict with his authority as the supreme philosopher, and is intended to parallel the clash with Frederick's imperial authority. Indeed the architecture of Book IV's opening chapters is subtly underpinned by the notion that the Emperor and the philosopher should complement and reinforce one another, something made explicit only in chapter vi. It may be that the mention of Aristotle's view of mass opinion has been introduced primarily for a

structural reason—which is not to deny that Dante thought it caused a problem for him. It was certainly a problem that he felt needed to be resolved before proceeding to his own definition and discussion of nobility. So too in the case of Frederick, though the ways in which Dante seeks to resolve his two conflicts are very different. It will be convenient to consider then in reverse order, since the imperial impediment, so to speak, is dealt with unproblematically and is in any case not central to our enquiry. Briefly, in *Convivio*, IV. viii. 13 Dante tells us that in dissenting from the Emperor he has displayed no irreverence, though he has been non-reverent. Chapter ix explains that in this case no reverence was due: it is a matter of the limitations of authority. Whereas the Emperor has absolute authority in the sphere of civil organization (for instance, laws governing marriage or inheritance) what he may think about nobility is quite different: it is a matter of moral philosophy, and the Emperor *qua* Emperor is not a philosopher. The following chapter tells us precisely why Dante disagrees with Frederick. It is because his twofold definition is both false and a small part of the truth. His first criterion, *antica ricchezza*, is simply wrong, for neither riches nor the passage of time can make someone noble. His second, *belle maniere*, is not wholly wide of the mark (but, as we may infer from the later discussion, in chapters xviii and xx especially, these are among the fruits of a noble nature, not one of its causes).

Earlier, in chapter viii, Dante tackles the conflict with Aristotle, not by setting limits to his authority, but by way of a distinction, and not a very felicitous one, to say the least. The disagreement, it now seems, is only apparent: when Aristotle says that majority opinion cannot be wholly false “non intende dicere del parere di fuori, cioè sensuale, ma di quello dentro, cioè razionale” (*Convivio* IV. viii. 6). So Aristotle was speaking of the inner judgment made by reason, not of irrational superficial opinions based on the senses. It is implied that the stance of the *gente volgare* on nobility falls into the latter category. If this implication seems odd, Dante’s next words make it odder still. For he goes on to say that a majority view based on sensory data is very often likely to be “falsissimo, massimamente ne li sensibili comuni, là dove lo senso spesse volte è ingannato”. Now the “common sensibles” in Aristotelian philosophy, have nothing to do with some putative “common sense”, over and above the traditional quintet of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. They are simply those entities that may be apprehended by two or more of the senses. Where

an object of sensation is peculiar to one sense only (such as a color, which can only be seen, or a sound, which can only be heard) the senses of sight or hearing are not liable to error, at least in so far as they register that there is a color or sound. But of course we may easily interpret such basic sense-impressions falsely, in respect of (say) which color it is, or how bright it is, or how loud or high-pitched is the sound, or how big, small, long or short something is. However, there are other things that are not the exclusive property, so to speak, of any one sense. Aristotle lists five: motion, rest, number, shape and size. With these, error is especially likely to occur (hence Dante's "massimamente").¹⁶ Dante is quite familiar with these categories; earlier in the *Convivio*, indeed, he has enumerated them: "la figura, la grandezza, lo numero, lo movimento e lo stare fermo" (III. ix. 6). Here in the eighth chapter of Book IV (§7) he gives a specific example of a sensory error: "a la più gente lo sole pare di larghezza nel diametro d'un piede, e sì è ciò falsissimo".¹⁷ Very false indeed, for, as Dante now assures us, the sun's diameter is 35,750 miles.¹⁸ This example, which is taken from Aristotle,¹⁹ comes immediately before Dante's criticism of those who judge nobility from outward appearances, but if it is intended as some kind of parallel, it is a very strange one. For although the sun's diameter seems to be only a foot, surely no sane person would believe this to be so in reality. We all know from common experience that any object increases in apparent size the closer we get to it. And although for practical purposes we never get closer to the sun, we do not need to be astronomers to know that it is very far away, and therefore much larger than it seems. Now Aristotle, though he does not explicitly say that we correct this erroneous sense-impression, never suggests that any of us accepts it as true. Neither does Aquinas, in his commentary on this passage of the *De Anima*.²⁰ Yet, strangely, this is just what Dante seems to do: for he says "a la più gente lo sole pare . . .", etc. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that Dante goes on to denounce the majority's view of nobility as grounded in sense-error (an error, presumably, involving the common sensibles). For the masses consider such things as grand matrimonial alliances, awe-inspiring buildings and abundant wealth to be not just the cause or hallmark of nobility, but as synonymous with it. A rational judgment, however, would consider such things to be among the *effects* of nobility:

Ché costoro . . . non giudicano se non per quelle che sentono di queste cose che la fortuna può dare e torre; ché perché veggiono fare le parentele ne li alti matrimonii, li edifici mirabili, le possessioni larghe, le signorie grandi, credono quelle

essere cagioni di nobilitade, anzi essa nobilitade credono quelle essere. Che s'elli giudicassero con l'apparenza²¹ razionale, dicerebbero lo contrario, cioè la nobilitade essere cagione di questo . . . (*Convivio*, IV. viii. 9).

The distinction, then, is between a correct view of nobility (based on reason) and a fallacious one (based on the senses). Quite apart from the fundamental Aristotelian (and trenchantly anti-Platonist) tenet that all knowledge is a result of the mind's abstraction from sense-data, Dante seems to be saying that the true and the false views of nobility are the result of two different kinds of mental process. But it is hard to see how sense-error comes into it. Indeed, what Aristotle regards as typical sensory deception seems quite unrelated to notions concerning nobility; yet Dante, by using the analogy of the sun's apparent size, seems to make just such a connection. Wicksteed found this bizarre, and did not mince his words: "[t]he reader's 'noble intellect' will not complain of being allowed to draw its own conclusion as to the value of Dante's attempt to show that the popular opinion he is here attacking is not really a judgment at all, whether good or bad, but a sense impression".²²

Now throughout this discussion we have been concerned with Aristotle's alleged views on mass opinion. At no point does the *Convivio* tell us what he thought about nobility; indeed if Dante had brought in his authority on that score, he would have been in difficulties, for in the *Politics* Aristotle defines nobility as "virtue and ancient wealth" (IV. vi. 5; 1294a 21–22—in Moerbeke's version: "ingenuitas enim est virtus et divitiae antiquae").²³ This of course is practically the view that Dante attributes to Frederick II and that he so roundly condemns. But whereas he could disregard the Emperor's opinion on such a matter, as being simply *ultra vires*, he could not possibly do so in the case of Aristotle, since it is precisely one of the philosopher's tasks to address questions of this kind. Dante certainly knew the *Politics*:²⁴ there are quotations from and references to it in a number of his works, though it is worth noting that those in the *Convivio* are concerned with Book I of the *Politics* only.²⁵ When he wrote the *Convivio* he surely cannot have been familiar with those words from the fourth book; perhaps his reading of Aristotle's treatise had been interrupted, or perhaps he had access only to an incomplete version. However, by the time he wrote the *Monarchia* he did know of the Aristotelian definition: "Est enim nobilitas virtus et divitiae antiquae, iuxta Philosophum in *Politiciis*" (II. iii. 4). But to return to the double clash with

authority: the very fact that, in an extensive *quaestio disputata de nobilitate*, the conflict with Frederick II has precisely to do with his opinion on this matter, whereas that with Aristotle concerns something else entirely—that fact sidelines Aristotle's views on nobility and the question of how much Dante may have known about them (and when). So why in fact is Aristotle mentioned? Here we may amplify the structural suggestion made earlier. Dante wants to bring in Aristotle in parallel with the Emperor. He wants to do so because his quite deliberate political digression from the topic of nobility has to do not only with a defense and illustration, so to speak, of the ancient Roman Empire and its mediaeval successor, but also with an ideal co-operation between imperial and philosophical authority. This co-operation is a matter of vital importance for human society. For imperial authority exercised without the guidance of authoritative philosophy is a dangerous thing; and conversely, because society is prone to disorder, the philosopher's authority is ineffective without the backing of the Emperor's power: "E [l'autoritate del filosofo] non repugna a la imperiale autoritate; ma quella senza questa è pericolosa, e questa senza quella è quasi debile, non per sé, ma per la disordinanza de la gente" (IV. vi. 17). But the two authorities in combination are: "utilissime e pienissime . . . d'ogni vigore" (IV. vi. 18). Dante immediately adds a scriptural endorsement: when the Book of Wisdom urges rulers to be wise it does so because the conjunction of the two authorities results in perfect government: "'Amate lo lume de la sapienza, voi tutti che siete dinanzi a' populi,' cioè a dire: congiungasi la filosofica autoritate con la imperiale, a bene e perfettamente reggere."²⁶ Given this intimate connection, in an ideal political order, between Emperor and Philosopher, it may well be that Dante wanted to set his disagreement with Frederick alongside one with Aristotle. In other words, he wanted to establish a parallel structure of conflict with *auctoritates*, so that having resolved (or allegedly resolved) the conflicts with the twin pillars of secular authority, he could then proceed with confidence towards his own passionate analysis of nobility, the concern of chapters xvi–xxi.

The foregoing observations are intended to supply a structural context for "quello che pare a li più," a context that appears not to have received sufficient emphasis. But they do not imply that Dante did not believe Aristotle to have held such a view (even though he considered that a distinction between sense-based illusion and rational judgment could crucially clarify this view in respect of popular opinions on nobility). Certainly "quello che pare" does invite a doctrinal, as well as a structural,

interpretation, though it has to be said that exegesis along these lines has not been very successful. More specifically: (a) Aristotle seems never to have asserted the view ascribed to him, a view Dante himself abhorred; (b) *Convivio* editors and commentators have adduced certain mediaeval glosses which do modify some Aristotelian texts so as to bring them closer to what Dante says, but in the end these parallels are not very close. Indeed, if it be asserted that, when there are a number of divergent opinions, some held for a long time by many, others by the wise few, then certain of these opinions are likely to be right (see above, p. 99)—if that assertion is confused with the view that a particular opinion is likely to be right merely because many hold it, then little light is cast on Dante's words.

It does seem that here we are faced with a text that, if taken in a narrowly doctrinal sense, is at odds with Aristotle himself and with Dante. Yet, once placed firmly within the architecture of the imperial-philosophical partnership that Dante so fervently proposes for the good of all, then its real purpose and significance become clear.

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NOTES

1. No precise source for this view has been found in any of Frederick's writings; indeed a poem attributed to him denies any connection between wealth and nobility. On the other hand, one of his letters does link it to ancestral generosity (which presupposes wealth). For details of this, see *Convivio*, ed. Cesare Vasoli and Domenico De Robertis, in Dante Alighieri, *Opere minori* (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1988), I/2, 544, *in fine*. Other *Convivio* editions referred to in this study are those of Francesco Flamini, in *Le opere minori di Dante Alighieri* . . . , vol. I (Livorno: Giusti, 1910); Giovanni Busnelli and Giuseppe Vandelli (Florence: Le Monnier, 1964²); and Franca Brambilla Ageno (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995).

2. The use of *latrare* here is unusual and striking (though it is not mentioned in the Busnelli-Vandelli, Vasoli or Ageno editions). Elsewhere in Dante the verb occurs, with one exception, only in—or with reference to—*Inferno*: 6. 14 (Cerberus); 30. 20 (Hecuba, who “forsennata latrò sì come cane”); 32. 105 and 108 (Bocca degli Abati); *Par.* 6. 74 (a back-reference to Brutus and Cassius in *Inf.* 34). The exception is found in the last of the *rime petrose* (*Rime* 103. 59 in Barbi's edition); this is number 80 in the Foster-Boyde edition, whose note refers to *Convivio*, IV. iii. 8, observing that there Dante's metaphor denotes “only bestial stupidity,” whereas the traitors' barking signifies both bestiality and despair (II, 279). The editions referred to are: Michele Barbi, in the Società Dantesca Italiana *Opere di Dante* (Florence: Bemporad, 1921); Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

3. The text is quoted from the Marietti edition of St Thomas' commentary: *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis in Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum Expositio*, ed. R.M. Spiazzi (Turin, Marietti, 1964³), VII,

lectio XIII, n. 1058 (p. 399b). All my quotations from mediaeval Latin versions of Aristotle, and from St Thomas' commentaries, are taken from the Marietti editions.

4. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 763; translated by H.G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1914), 58.

5. Related by Herodotus, *History*, I, 30–33; translated by A.D. Godley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1966), especially 38.

6. See for instance Aristotle, *De Anima* III, ix; 432b22: "natura nihil facit frustra, neque deficit in necessariis" ["nature does nothing in vain, nor does it fail in those things that are necessary."] (Latin text in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis in Aristotelis librum de Anima Commentarium*, ed. A.M. Pirota (Turin: Marietti; 1959^o), 188b; Thomas' comment is n. 811, 191a–b). For Dante's use of the principle see Patrick Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 230, 293, 380 n.61.

7. Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896–1917), First Series, 381.

8. See the note not to *Convivio*, IV. iii. 9 but to IV. viii. 6, where Dante repeats the phrase "Quello che pare a li più . . .". It is worth pointing out that the Busnelli-Vandelli and Vasoli editions have important notes at *both* these points in the text.

9. Here Aquinas is referring to *Ethics* IV. v. 7 (1126a12–13), where Aristotle says that evil will destroy even itself (the immediate context is the self-defeating futility of any excessive vice, in this case anger).

10. Bruno Nardi, "La filosofia di Dante," in *Grande antologia filosofica*, ed. U.A. Padovani and A. M. Moschetti (Milan: Marzorati, 1954), IV, 1149–1253 (1204 n.1).

11. Here I have quoted from the Loeb translation, which seems more accurate than Nardi's Italian: *Aristotle VIII: On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, On Breath*, translated by W.S. Hett, 2nd edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1957), p. 375.

12. In Aristotle, *Opera omnia* (Venice: apud Iuntas, 1562–74), vol. VI, ii, fol. 33va.

13. Averroes, *Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis de Anima libros*, ed. F.S. Crawford (Cambridge, Mass: The Medieval Academy of America, 1953), 409. But this phrase of Averroes is not a direct comment on the *De anima* III. iv; 429a21–24: it is in fact a purely incidental remark in the course of an extensive review and refutation of opinions concerning the Possible Intellect.

14. The translation is taken from Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics, Books I, II, and VIII*, translated by M. Woods, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 3.

15. Except for some fragments, and an isolated chapter from Book VII: see *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, edited by Norman Kretzmann and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 77.

16. For the distinction between the different kinds of sensible objects see *De anima* II. vi; 418a7–26. For the liability to err in respect of the common sensibles, see *De anima*, III. iii; 428b23–26. See also (for instance) G. E. R. Lloyd, *Aristotle: The Growth and Structure of his Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 193–94.

17. This example might seem to come under the category of size (one of the common sensibles), though in fact it does not. For Aristotle never says that in *all* cases size is apprehended multi-sensorially, and in this case we are clearly dealing with the faculty of vision alone. The error is simply one of under-estimation.

18. Dante's source for this figure is the ninth-century al-Farghani (known in the West as Alfraganeus). See Paget Toynbee, *Dante Studies and Researches* (London: Methuen, 1902), 75–76.

19. *De anima* III, iii; 428b2–5.

20. In *Aristotelis librum de Anima* . . . , n. 653, p. 160b.

21. *Apparenza* seems wrong here, but all the editions have it, save that of Ageno, who is probably right in substituting *parere*. See her justification in Franca Brambilla Ageno, "Nuove proposte per il *Convivio*," in *Studi danteschi*, 48 (1971), 121–36 (131 and 132).

22. *The "Convivio" of Dante Alighieri*, translated by P.H. Wicksteed (London: Dent, 1903). Not only is this an excellent translation, but the critical observations are extremely acute and after a century remain very valuable.

23. *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis in libros Politicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. R.M. Spiazzi (Turin: Marietti, 1951), 211b n. 23. The immediate context here is Aristotle's discussion of government according to a mixed form of political constitution in which three elements may claim an equal share, viz.: free birth (i.e. that of the free-born poor), wealth and virtue. Nobility might seem to be a fourth, distinct element, but it is not: "(for the fourth, what is called nobility, accompanies the two latter—nobility means ancient wealth and virtue)". That is the Loeb version: *Aristotle, Politics*, translated by H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1932), 319. Barker's famous translation has a strangely different rendering at this point: "(Nobility of birth, which is sometimes reckoned a fourth, is only a corollary of the two latter, and simply consists in an inherited mixture [*sic*] of wealth and merit.)" (*The Politics of Aristotle*, translated by E. Barker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), 208.)

24. Commenting on *Convivio*, IV. iv. 2, Vasoli (550) is rightly skeptical about Gilbert's view that Dante's knowledge was only indirect, via Aquinas and Giles of Rome; see A. Gilbert, "Had Dante read the *Politics* of Aristotle?" in *PMLA*, 43 (1928), 602–13.

25. See Moore (1896–1917), First Series, 342–43.

26. *Wisdom* 6.23.

Dante's Choice and Romance Narratives of Two Beloveds

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When Dante-the-pilgrim is beset with fears in *Inferno* 2 and hesitates to embark on his voyage of salvation, Virgilio comforts him by recounting Beatrice's tearful descent into Limbo on her lover's behalf. "Oh pietosa colei che mi soccorse!" (*Inf.* 2:133), Dante cries out with gratitude before setting out on his arduous journey back to her. The beloved whom he expects finally to encounter is "pietosa" or compassionate, one who—unlike most of the ladies of the vernacular lyric tradition—reciprocates her suitor's feelings and willingly requites his desires. Virgilio encourages him to look forward to their reunion; when the pilgrim is beset again by an intellectual doubt (regarding the efficacy of prayer) in *Purgatorio* 6, Virgilio gives the best explanation that he can, but then refers the matter to Beatrice: "tu la vedrai di sopra, in su la vetta / di questo monte, ridere e felice" (*Purg.* 6:47–48). Indeed, one of Beatrice's many referents is happiness itself, the contemplative *beatitudo* that Aristotle describes in the *Ethics* as the goal of all human activity (10:6), and Boethius in the *Consolation* as "the whole concern of men, which the effort of a multitude of pursuits keeps busy, moves by different roads, yet strives to arrive at one and the same end."¹ When Dante does see Beatrice at the summit of the mountain, however, her "pietade" is "acerba" (30:81); she is harsh and demanding at first approach, like the classical philosophers' choice of virtue over vice or the Biblical goddess of Wisdom.² The lady who initially appears to him in a luxurious cloud of pink flowers is transformed into a stern admiral who rebukes the pilgrim for his sentimentality over Virgilio's departure and then for his attentions to other women.

This is not the first time that we have known Beatrice to reproach her admirer for indiscreet behavior. In *Vita Nova* 5:1–2,³ she refuses to greet Dante on the street because of the rumors resulting from his attentions to the second screen lady. She apparently never speaks to him again in her lifetime, and he re-conceives the love celebrated in his poems as one in which the “beatitudine” at the goal of all his desires no longer consists of any kind of amorous reciprocity, but lies, rather, in the very act of praising her (10:6–8). Beatrice goes so far as to die later in the *libello*, thus excusing herself altogether—at least for the time being—from any expectation that she return his love. After her death, Dante falls in love temporarily with “una gentil donna giovane e bella molto, la quale da una finestra mi riguardava sì pietosamente quanto alla vista, che tutta la pietà pareva in lei accolta” (24:2). The salient characteristic of this new lady is her continuous compassion for him, and the immediate effect of this compassion is to exacerbate his self-pity so that he breaks down in tears. The narrator is apparently mistaken to think that the love that resides with this “pietosa donna” must be “nobilissimo” (24:3), a superlative normally reserved for Beatrice. Dante is initially attracted to the new lady because she reminds him of the old. They have the same complexion: “là ovunque questa donna mi vedea, si facea d’una vista pietosa e d’un colore palido quasi come d’amore [i.e. almost like that of Beatrice, who “is” Love]; onde molte fiate mi ricordava della mia nobilissima donna, che di simile colore si mostrava tuttavia” (25:1). The reason that the Gentil Donna even feels sorry for him is because of his losing Beatrice; the two ladies do not seem in conflict at first. The episode culminates, however, in a “battaglia de’ pensieri” or *psychomachia* in which the speaker’s heart (“cioè l’appetito”) is engaged in favor of the second lady, and against his soul (“cioè la Ragione”), who favors the first (27:5).

His love for the “pietosa donna” is redefined as a “desiderio malvagio e vana tentatione” (28:6); she turns out to be a representative of those “false imagini di ben” that do not keep their promises (*Purg.* 30:131–32), as opposed to Beatrice’s role as a true image of good, who keeps hers.⁴ Dante’s preference for immediate gratification, the Gentil Donna’s pity, over continuing a seemingly unrequited courtship of his dead beloved can be read as a negative version of Hercules at the Crossroads, in which the hero wrong-headedly elects the easy path of vice or pleasure over the difficult one of virtue.⁵ It also suggests Boethius’ opposition between Lady Philosophy’s exacting demands on the protagonist and the meretricious

Muses' fostering in him of the sweet poison of piteous verse. Like Lady Philosophy, Beatrice punctually reappears to Dante in a powerful vision at the end of this episode of the *Vita Nova* in order to drive out her enticing rival (28:1). But for the motifs of mistaken erotic object choices that do not keep their word and the recovery of lost love, Dante could draw on Romance sources as well. In the first part of this article I investigate Dante's utilization of such vernacular models as the troubadour *razos*, the Old French *Roman de la rose*, and the *pastorella* tradition, especially as found in the lyrics of Guido Cavalcanti. Later I will concentrate on how these erotic narratives are implicitly incorporated into the Purgatorial episodes of the pilgrim's encounter with Matelda and his reunion with Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise.

In many of the early Occitan lyric anthologies produced in Italy, the poems of the troubadours are accompanied by *vidas* and *razos*, introductory biographies of the individual authors and commentaries on their songs.⁶ A number of the *razos* tell the same basic story: a troubadour's love for a particular lady goes without reward for a long time, so he turns to another who is more sympathetic or promises to concede her favors, but he is usually disappointed by the second lady and returns to the first—frequently with the help of an intermediary—composing a song for the occasion.⁷ There is no compelling evidence, as far as I know, that Dante specifically knew any of the individual commentaries that have come down to us (except perhaps those for Bertran de Born),⁸ but he must have been generally familiar with the genre of biographical commentary on lyric verse written in a vernacular language, which was his closest model for the prosimetrum form of the *Vita Nova*. Since the pattern that I have described is so frequent, and the written *vidas* and *razos* are probably, at least in part, transcriptions of traditional spoken introductions (which seem to have flourished in northern Italy in the Duecento) to the performance of the songs, I see no obstacle to assuming that Dante was exposed to some version of this narrative scheme early on.⁹

Let us briefly examine, for example, *razo* B for Gaucelm Faidit. It begins by relating that Gaucelm fell in love with Maria de Ventadorn, and courted her and wrote songs for her, but in seven years she never gave him pleasure in love. So one day he demands that either she reward him as he deserves or he will leave her for someone else. At this point, Lady Maria confides in another woman, Lady Audiartz, who is described as “gentils e bela” [18.B.7] (cf. Dante's “gentil donna giovane e bella

molto”) and who promises to make Gaucelm give up his love for Maria. Audiartz sends a message to the troubadour, telling him to prefer a little bird in the hand to a crane flying in the sky. When Gaucelm comes to see her to ask about the message, she tells him lovingly that she has great pity for him (“ella li dis molt amorozen qu’el’ avia gran piatat de lui”) [line 12] and offers herself in Maria’s stead, vaunting her own qualifications as mistress: “E sabetz be qu’ieu soi gentils et auta de riquesa e joves d’ans, e ditz hom qu’ieu soi fort bela” (And you should know that I am noble, rich, and young, and I am said to be very beautiful) [14]. She advises him to tell Maria that he is following another road (“que segretz altra via”) [17]. Gaucelm is so surprised that he faints. When he recovers, he pledges his love to Audiartz. He composes a song in her honor, by which means Maria learns (much to her relief) that he no longer loves her. But when the troubadour visits Audiartz again, expecting easy entry into her bedroom, she explains that it was all just a trick to get him out of the prison of hopeless love in which he had been entrapped for seven years. Gaucelm begs Audiartz for mercy, but she is unrelenting. He then composes a song for Maria, begging her for mercy as well, but she refuses to pardon him. The story ends unhappily for the troubadour.

Like Gaucelm, Dante is attracted in the *Vita Nova* (and elsewhere) to a new lady who promises compassion and some form of immediate gratification. Audiartz’s overture to Gaucelm in the *razo* harks back to that of Wisdom in Proverbs 7, where she tries to distract the foolish young man from the alien woman who meets him in harlot’s attire by offering herself instead, and Audiartz’s self-praise also recalls that of Wisdom in Ecclesiasticus 24, where she is said to praise her own spirit (“Sapientia laudabit animam suam”) and goes on to boast of her origin, dwelling, dignity, and fruits. The self-proffering of the troubadour’s “other woman” thus closely resembles not only Lady Reason’s solicitation of the Lover in the thirteenth-century French allegorical poem, *Le Roman de la rose* (see especially v. 5768: “Sui je pas bele dame et gente?”; I discuss the *Roman* below), but also anticipates both Beatrice’s silent remonstrance of her lover in the vision of *Vita Nova* 28 and the stinging reproaches later addressed to him in the Earthly Paradise on the grounds that she had the most beautiful body he had ever seen: “Mai non t’appresentò natura o arte / piacer, quanto le belle membra in ch’io / rinchiusa fui [. . .]” (*Purg.* 31:49–51). Unlike Beatrice’s—and Wisdom’s—self-glorification, however, that of Audiartz seems to promote a “wrong” choice or road, more

like the way of foreign woman of Proverbs that leads to hell (see 7:25–27). It is less clear than in Dante—and perhaps not even sustainable—that the troubadour's erotic choice also stands for an ethical one, but Dante clearly draws on the same narrative structure, although he may associate elements of the original pattern with their contraries at times, or combine contraries into a unity, as in a dream.¹⁰

I am not suggesting that our poet necessarily knew this particular *razo* for Gaucelm Faidit, however. Any number of others would have served as well. In Uc de Saint Circ's signed *razo* for Savaric de Malleo [28.B], for instance, the notion of erotic choice is even more manifest. In it, we learn how for a long time Savaric loved a "dona gentil," and did many things for her, but she paid him back with "folas promessas" (mad promises) and deceived him with "falsas razos" (false explanations) [4]. Savaric's friends tell him of her perfidy and indicate another woman to him, who accepts his courtship and fixes a day for him to come to her. But when the first lady gets wind of the situation, she grants the troubadour a secret rendezvous on the same day. He then participates in a *tenso*, or debate poem, in order to decide to which lady he should go on the established day. Once again, the ethical valences of the two women (whether positive or negative) are ambiguous. But this is not always the case: in *razo* B for Uc de Saint Circ—of which Uc is the protagonist, rather than the author¹¹—the troubadour is clearly presented as erring in turning away from his first beloved, and as acting righteously in returning to her. When the second lady, Ponsa, envious of Uc's songs in praise of his lady Clara, sends for the troubadour to offer her own favors, the biographer says that Uc "non fo fermes ni lials a neguna qe vas autra part volontier non s'en percases," (was never so constant or faithful to a woman that he would not willingly seek to obtain another elsewhere), and that he leaves Clara "malemen" (wrongly or wickedly) [33.B.13].¹² Clara conceives a great disdain for the troubadour at this point, and it is only due to the intervention of a third lady on his behalf that she eventually makes peace with him. This recovery of her good graces is the occasion for Uc's composition of the *chanson de congé* "Anc mais non vi" in which he celebrates his escape from a "mal' amor."

The motif of the third lady who acts as an intermediary between the lover and his original beloved is picked up by Dante in *Inferno* 2, where it is recounted that Lucia came to Beatrice in heaven and asked her why she would not succor "quei che t'amò tanto, / ch'uscì per te de la volgare

schiera" (*Inf.* 2:104–5).¹³ Indeed, the image is splintered or fractured, for not only did Lucia beg Beatrice to help Dante, but just before that a heavenly "donna gentil" (generally interpreted as the Virgin Mary) intervened with Lucia herself in his favor. And the theme recurs again in the lovers' reunion on top of Mount Purgatory, when the angels intervene to temper Beatrice's harshness toward the pilgrim, seeming to say "Donna, perché sì lo stempres?" (*Purg.* 30:96; I will come back to this passage). This is a frequent device in the troubadour narratives. In *razo* B for Pons de Capdoill, the troubadour decides to test the sincerity of his lady's feelings by pretending to court another woman (named Audiartz, as in the *razo* for Gaucelm Faidit), but this strategy backfires, for the first lady, Alazais, expresses only scorn for him as a result (like Uc de Saint Circ's Clara), and Pons soon realizes his mistake. Nothing he can do will win back her good graces, however, until three powerful ladies, including Maria de Ventadorn, intervene and beg Alazais for mercy on his behalf. She agrees to pardon him only for their sake ("Et ella o fetz per amor de las dompnas") [47.B.18]. In *razo* B for Richart de Berbezill, the original beloved goes so far as to refuse to receive the lover again until one hundred ladies and one hundred knights beg her to forgive him on bended knee. Much to her surprise, they do.

The recurrent theme of the lover's temporary attraction to a different, apparently more compassionate lady, whose compassion often turns out to be deceptive, reverberates not only in the Donna Gentile episode of the *Vita Nova*, but also in the allegorical interpretation of that episode in *Convivio* 2:12 where the "consolation" that the lover seeks for the beloved's inaccessibility—in this case, because of her death—is found in the study of Philosophy. Dante explains his poetic allegory: "E imaginava lei [la filosofia] fatta come una donna gentile, e non la poteva immaginare in atto alcuno, se non misericordioso" (2.12.6). Once again, however, the valences are reversed here with respect to the troubadour biographies, where the many secondary *domnas* generically described as "gentils" and "belas" seem mostly to lead the poets away from their intended and rightful beloveds. In the context of the *Convivio*, at least, Philosophy is figured as a sincere and faithful mistress, who entirely requites the speaker's desires. Her role as provider of consolation and comfort is obviously also based, to a large extent, on that of Boethius' Lady Philosophy, but Dante's depiction of her as erotically desirable (especially in the *canzoni*) actually

has more in common with the Sapiential tradition. Long before the beautiful young lady looked from a window with compassion on the protagonist of the *Vita Nova*, Wisdom looked out of the window of her house in Proverbs 7:6ff. and beheld the foolish young man, led astray by temptation.¹⁴ The detail of the window is implicitly accounted for later in the *Convivio*, when, in his “literal” exposition of a reference to the lady’s “occhi” and “dolce riso” in the *canzone* “Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona,” Dante writes, “Li quali due luoghi, per bella similitudine, si possono appellare balconi de la donna che nel dificio del corpo abita, cioè l’anima,” and goes on to explain that the human soul cannot feel any of the six passions properly belonging to it—one of which is “misericordia”—without that passion’s semblance showing itself “a la finestra de li occhi” [3.8.9–10]. Thus looking out of a window at someone functions as an image for every sort of interpersonal emotional response.

The Donna Gentile’s gaze from a high window also seems to comprise that of Lady Reason, who twice descends from her tower to comfort the lover in the Old French *Roman de la rose*. In the first part of the poem, by Guillaume de Lorris, Reason, who appears to the lover when he is feeling downcast after being rebuffed from the rose by *Dangiers* or Resistance, is described as “la dame de la haute engarde, / qui de sa tor aval esgarde” (the lady of the high vantage-point, who looks down from her tower) [2957–58]. When she reappears after another rebuff in the second part of the poem, by Jean de Meun, she is described as “Reson, la bele, l’avenant, / qui de sa tour jus descendi / quant mes complaints entendi” (Beautiful and charming Reason, who came down from her tower when she heard my complaints) [4196–98]. The rational or philosophical part of the soul is traditionally figured as residing in the mind or head as if in a high fortress or castle, from which it reigns over the other faculties; St. Augustine, for instance, says of mind and reason that the philosophers “locate this third part of the soul in a kind of citadel, to rule the other parts, so that, with reason in command and the other parts serving it, justice may be preserved as between all the parts of man’s soul” (*City of God* 14:19; see Fenzi, “Boezio” 41). Dante himself refers in *Convivio* 4.13.16 to the “diritta torre de la ragion,” surely related to the “diritta via” lost at the beginning of *Inferno* 1.

But if Reason descends from her tower, as will Dante’s Donna Gentile from her window (presumably), and Beatrice later from heaven, this is also because Biblical Wisdom, too, is associated with a tower or citadel

and issues from on high,¹⁵ and Lady Philosophy seems to stand above her follower's head at the beginning of the *Consolation* (1.p.1). Guillaume represents Reason as, like Boethius' Philosophy, neither young, nor old, tall, nor short, with a royal crown on her head and eyes that shine like stars (2962–67). He goes on to describe her as fashioned in paradise directly by God himself, rather than by Nature, and as having the power and authority to keep man from folly (2969–79). Thus she resembles the Wisdom of Proverbs, who was created by God in the beginning of his ways (8:22f.; cf. Eccles. 24:14) and delivers her followers from the allurements of the foolish woman (9:13). Jean also conceives of Reason as a Wisdom-figure, who deigns to offer herself to the lover in sexual terms, and to market her own celestial attributes as alternatives to the earthly charms of the rose. Like the seductive “other women” of the troubadour commentaries, she boasts of her beauty and high pedigree—she is the daughter of God himself—and promises the lover that if he will be true to her, he will never lack anything he needs (5768–87). The discourse of Jean's Reason is markedly Boethian, especially in the opposition that she sets up between the inalienable goods that she offers and the temporary pleasures bestowed by the Lady Fortune. According to John Fleming, the *conflictus* at the heart of the *Roman* “is the conflict of two different ways of loving: the conflict of charity and cupidity, Reason and Sensuality, the conflict of the ‘two ways’ of Lactantius, the conflict implied by the spreading arms of the Pythagorean Y” (*Roman de la rose* 108). In this, it anticipates the strife between the “two ways” in the heart of the pilgrim at the beginning of the *Divina Commedia*.¹⁶

Unlike Beatrice in the *Commedia*, however, or even Philosophy in the context of the *Convivio*, Reason is ultimately refused in the course of the *Roman*. The lover rejects her twice, in the sections by both authors, preferring on each occasion to maintain his loyalty to the God of Love, and ultimately to the rose. The pattern is thus more like that of the *Vita Nova*, in which the image of Beatrice, whose name is Love (15:5 and 9), drives out the thought of the Donna Gentile from the fortress of Dante's mind, or like that of Dante's works taken as an organic system, if we interpret the return of Beatrice in Purgatory as putting an end to his flirtation with secular reason or philosophy.¹⁷ There has been much discussion of how Reason should be taken in the *Roman*, whether as the author's mouthpiece, which would imply a condemnation of the protagonist's rejection of her (see especially Fleming), or, rather, as an imperfect

and limited guide who is unaware of her own limitations (see, for example, Rowe). I personally tend to read the speeches of Reason as largely determining the perspective of the argument, but as, at the same time, something of a caricature, and the dispute at the heart of the romance as not between a good and an evil, but between two rhetorical systems, that of learned philosophical discourse and that of courtly love (reflected in, for example, the lover's shock at Reason's use of non-figurative language for sexual referents). In other words, I take the implicit condemnation of the lover's position as present, but its tone as playful and ironic. It is not my purpose to define the author's intention, however—a notoriously difficult task under any circumstances, but especially in this complex, two-authored text.

Determining how one particular reader—and writer—understood or made use of the *Roman* may prove more fruitful, however. Dante appears to draw on the same image-complex (Reason's solicitation of the lover and his refusal) while taking it entirely seriously. This may be in part what Gianfranco Contini means when he calls the *Commedia* an "anti-parody" of the earlier text ("Un nodo" 295). On the one hand, Dante presents himself as a morally-corrected version of the rose's lover, who allows himself to be guided by reason; this is especially true in the *Vita Nova*, where it is reason that helps the protagonist overcome the foolish temptations of appetite. On the other hand, Beatrice's return represents—among other things—a turning away from classical philosophy or natural reason which lacks a theological grounding (here we can refer to her supplanting not only the Donna Gentile but also Virgilio). Both of these mutually exclusive perspectives are allowed to co-exist: Dante refuses to act as Amant does in embracing a purely sensual and physiological interpretation of love with respect to the rose, and, at the same time, acts precisely as Amant does in refusing to turn away from "love" at all. This latter perspective finds its culmination in the sublimated allusion to the final conquest of Jean de Meun's profane rose in the vision of the Celestial Rose at the end of the *Paradiso*.¹⁸

Another example of Dante's adaptation of imagery from the *Roman* while reversing its ethical valences can be found in his transformations of the Garden of Deduit (Diversion or Pleasure).¹⁹ The protagonist comes upon this garden, surrounded by a high wall, toward the very beginning of the *Roman*, and its gate is opened for him by the maiden Oiseuse (Idleness), who is initially described—like so many of the attractive young

women that we have encountered—as “gente et bele” [524] (cf. Reason’s “Sui je pas bele dame et gente?” 5768). Scholars such as Köhler, Bleeth, Contini, and Richards have found parallels between this figure and both Leah, who appears in the pilgrim’s third Purgatorial dream, and Matelda, the first character whom he meets in Eden, and whom he addresses as “bella donna” (*Purg.* 28:43). Oiseuse wears a chaplet of fresh roses and holds a mirror in her hand, passing her time combing and braiding her hair [553–86]. Dante’s Leah passes her own time making a garland for her hair “per piacermi a lo specchio,” while explaining that her sister Rachel “mai non si smaga / dal suo miraglio” (*Purg.* 27:103–5). Whereas Oiseuse stands for something like the leisurely lifestyle necessary to the courtly lover (if not for something more explicitly negative like *luxuria* or lust), the women of Dante’s dream are Christian symbols for the Active and Contemplative Lives. As Kenneth Bleeth points out: “In repatterning Leah, the traditional representative of the Active Life, on the figure of Oiseuse, Dante interprets the iconographic attributes of Guillaume’s maiden in bono, and anticipates the special character of the Earthly Paradise” (37)—i.e., the exemption of its inhabitants from Adam’s curse, the obligation to work in order to eat (Genesis 3.17).

The parallels between Oiseuse and Matelda, and between the two gardens that they preside over, are developed even more extensively. When the lover enters the Garden of Deduit, he remarks that he believed himself to be in “paradis terrestre,” so spiritual did the place seem [633–36]. The songbirds there are compared to “angre esperitel” (heavenly angels), and then, rather more ambiguously, to “seraines de mer” (sea-sirens), because of the sweetness of their song [659–72].²⁰ Both Guillaume’s and Dante’s gardens are classic *loci amoeni* with birdsong, a shady grove of trees, flowers, a clear stream, and so on.²¹ The “donna soletta” (*Purg.* 28:40) whom Dante encounters, and who, like Leah, goes about singing and picking flowers, recalls the beautiful, solitary maiden who admitted Guillaume’s protagonist into the earlier pleasance. The assistance of both ladies allows their charges to take part in a heavenly dance: similarly to the songbirds, the allegorical members of the carol in the *Roman* (Joy, Courtesy, Beauty, etc.) are compared to “angres empenez” (winged angels) because of their great beauty [723]; whereas the dance that Matelda (herself compared to a “donna che balla,” 28:53) eventually leads Dante to join is that of “le quattro belle” who identify themselves as stars descended from the sky (31:103–6). The four cardinal virtues really *are* stars in Dante’s universe,

of course, just as the pilgrim really visits the Earthly Paradise, and encounters real angels there, whereas the garden of the *Roman* is only said to resemble Eden, and its dancing courtly virtues are only like angels; this does not appear to have prevented Dante from drawing on its imagery, however.

Why does Dante choose to pattern (in part) his sacred, sinless garden after Guillaume's sinful—or at least secular—one? What connection does he imply between Oiseuse and the two typologically related figures of Leah and Matelda? Clearly, on one level, the relationship is ironic. Oiseuse stands for idleness or leisure, the aristocratic privilege of not working, while Leah and Matelda stand metonymically for (in Dante's own words) "happiness in this life, which consists in the exercise of our own powers" (*Monarchia* 3.16.7), i.e. the Active Life. In the context of the *Commedia*, however, the Earthly Paradise does not just figure the good life embodied in the practice of the moral and intellectual virtues, but the happiness that comes as the reward for living this way, the return to the condition of life before such efforts were necessary. As Bleeth has suggested, the special character of Dante's Eden is that, "[e]xempted from the strictures and responsibilities of the workaday world, it is a version of the Golden Age, a place where one is free to take one's personal pleasure as a guide to the perfect life" (37). In other words, it is a place where dalliance with compassionate *donne gentili* does not lead astray, where it is all right not only to pass under their window, but to knock at the door, and to follow after the gracious young lady who opens it. The achievement of effortless inner rectitude symbolized by Leah and Matelda is not an absolute goal, however, but merely a pleasant interlude or way-station on the journey toward a more exalted and arduous form of happiness (symbolized by Rachel and Beatrice). Matelda tells the pilgrim that God gave Eden to man "per arr' . . . d'eterna pace"—as an earnest or material token in anticipation of the Paradise above (*Purg.* 28:93). Whereas Guillaume's fabulous garden is later contrasted, in Jean's part of the *Roman*, with Genius' description of the true park of the white lamb [20223 ff.], Dante's Terrestrial Paradise both symbolically prefigures and literally leads upward to the Celestial one; indeed, the only route to heaven available to fallen humanity passes directly through it.²²

As has frequently been noted, Dante also draws on other Romance models in constructing Matelda's garden. Singleton (2:214–16) sees the pilgrim's encounter with Matelda as falling exactly into the typical pattern

of the vernacular lyric *pastorella*, in which the poet tells how he wandered alone one spring day in the countryside and came upon a shepherdess, whom he immediately felt a strong desire to possess. The outcome could vary. Singleton and others (Natali, Poggioli, Bosco, Barolini, Hawkins) point particularly to the resemblance between the scene in Purgatory and Guido Cavalcanti's, "In un boschetto trova' pasturella," which ends happily for the speaker, whom the shepherdess takes by the hand and leads to a green bower, where he sees "fior' d'ogni colore" and a vision of the God of Love (Contini, *Poeti* 2:555–56). Guido's unnamed maiden is said to have "occhi pien' d'amor"—compare Dante's assertion that Matelda's eyes shone with a greater light than those of Venus in love ("trafitta / dal figlio fuor di tutto suo costume," 28:65–66)—and to wander alone in the wood ("sola sola per lo bosco gia")—compare Dante's "donna soletta che si gia" (28:40).²³ The rustic maiden also sings "come fosse 'namorata," and Matelda, at the beginning of the next canto, "come donna innamorata" (29:1); as Umberto Bosco puts it, "l'ipotesi diventa in Dante asserzione" (141). Matelda, a woman in love, is the perfected version of all those other courtly ladies in whose eyes could be seen love, if perhaps only the poets' own. In Dante's sonnet which begins, "Negli occhi porta la mia donna Amore / per che si fa gentil ciò ch'ella mira" (*Vita Nova* 12:2), for example, it is clear that the power borne in the lady's eyes makes all who see her fall in love with her, not that she loves all whom she sees; but the love in Matelda's eyes is Christian *caritas*, and reaches out to all of creation, including the pilgrim.

In describing the Garden of Eden, Dante is influenced not only by his friend Guido's *pastorella*, but by the *pastorella*-genre in general, as well as by the tone and diction of the poetic style identified with Dante's label *Dolce stil novo*. Linguistic cues, including typical lyric words like "dolce," "sembianti," and "core," diminutives like "augelletti," "fiumicello," "fioretti," and so forth, abound (see Contini, *Varianti* 468; Kirkham 414). Dante's portraits, both of Leah, who makes for herself a garland (27:102), and of Matelda, who distinguishes "fior da fiore" (28:41), hark back to his own poems for Fioretta (or Violetta), who wears a "ghirlandetta di fior gentile" (*Rime* 10). The encounter with Matelda also specifically evokes another "pastorella" by Cavalcanti, "Una giovane donna di Tolosa."²⁴ The lady of this sonnet is described as "bell' e gentil," and the speaker falls in love with her because she resembles his original beloved in the eyes: "è tant' e dritta e simigliante cosa, / ne' suoi dolci occhi, della donna

mia." Her effect on him is so powerful that she fills his soul with desire, and it departs ("si svia") from his heart and goes to her. Let us recall that Dante, too, falls in love with the compassionate lady in the *Vita Nova* because she reminds him of Beatrice, and that the "gentil donna"—the thought of whom drives out all other thoughts—is ultimately construed as a mere distraction or detour on the road back to the "gentilissima." Matelda also appears to the pilgrim "sì com'elli appare / subitamente cosa che disvia / per meraviglia tutto altro pensare" (28:37–39), although in this case the leading astray is purely figurative; she is like a "cosa che disvia," but, as it turns out, she is not one. This new Donna Gentile directs him toward Beatrice, not away from her.²⁵

Another pastoral poem relevant to the Dante's Earthly Paradise is Guido's *ballata* "Era in penser d'amor" (*Poeti* 2:532–33), in which, in classic Cavalcantian fashion, the number of ladies is multiplied (see also his "Veggio negli occhi," *Poeti* 2:521). The speaker is absorbed by melancholy thoughts, when he encounters two "foresette" or peasant girls, one of whom is singing, "E' piove / gioco d'amore in noi." He complains to them of the injury ("colpo") that he has borne since he was in Tolosa. One of them laughs at his love-sickness—Matelda also laughs in the face of the pilgrim's ardent desire—and the other is described as "pietosa, piena di mercede"—Matelda is later called "quella pia" (32:82).²⁶ Even the notion of love's pleasure raining into them seems to call up, by contrast, Dante's address to the custodian of Eden as she who warms herself, rather, by love's sunbeams (28:43). When the compassionate country-girl asks Guido's speaker to remember the eyes that wounded his heart, he replies: "E' mi ricorda che 'n Tolosa / donna m'apparve, accordellata istretta," and then names the *Tolosana* (for the first time) as "la Mandetta" (or "l'Amandetta"). Mandetta's hieratic apparition is echoed not only in that of Matelda ("là m'apparve . . . una donna soletta," 28:37–40), but even more faithfully in Beatrice's subsequent one ("donna m'apparve, sotto verde manto," 30:32). The appearances of both Mandetta and Beatrice are followed immediately by a specification of what they are wearing, and then by a description of their physiological effects on their lovers. If Matelda comes as the perfected version of all previous earthly beloveds—not only Dante's own, but those of Cavalcanti and other poets as well—Beatrice comes finally as the heavenly fulfillment of that very perfection.

Michelangelo Picone describes the characteristic thematic element of the *pastorella* as “la possibilità di comunicazione fra i due partners, lo storicissimo incontro, la vicinanza fisica che può arrivare fino al contatto pieno, all’unione sessuale” (77). The speaker leaves the court or town, where the inaccessible beloved resides, for the countryside, a sort of erotic periphery with respect to the center of amorous inspiration. The encounter with the shepherdess is thus the result of, according to Picone, “un deviamiento dalla retta via, dalla *fin’amor*, perché questa sembra soltanto capace di riservare pene e sofferenze” (85). Dante recalls the *pastorella*-genre in the *Purgatorio*, as he did in the *Vita Nova*, when the protagonist commits—or seems poised to commit—an act of infidelity to Beatrice.²⁷ There is little doubt that the pilgrim is sexually attracted to Matelda. Drawing on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Claudian’s *De raptu Proserpinae* (see Brown), he likens her, gathering flowers and singing, to Proserpina at the moment when she is spotted by Pluto, just before her abduction, and likens his gaze implicitly to that of her abductor (*Purg.* 28:49–51). According to Peter Hawkins, the allusion suggests misleadingly “that from Dante’s vision of Matelda, delight—and also rape—will follow” (166). But this “Proserpina” does not seem an unwilling sexual partner: at the pilgrim’s request, she draws closer to him and raises her eyes. At this point the poet compares her to the goddess Venus and then himself—in his hatred of the stream that separates them—to the tragic hero Leander, who drowned while swimming across the Hellespont to visit his beloved Hero. All three classical allusions, like the Romance elements already discussed (the evocations of the troubadour *razos*, the *Roman de la rose*, and the *pastorella*-genre), arouse prurient expectations: we expect the relationship to be consummated. Yet, of course, it is not.

Or is it? In the troubadour *razos*, it was generally a mistake when the courtly lover abandoned one lady for a new one, with the expectation of greater compassion or more immediate gratification, and he would sometimes lose both beloveds as a consequence. This pattern undergoes ironic reversal in the episode involving Reason in the *Roman*, in which the lover refuses to give up the prospect of physical gratification for the sublimated pleasures of the intellect. Finally, in the *pastorella*, the relation between the “knight” and the “shepherdess” is frequently consummated *with no negative consequences*. Dante is attracted to Matelda, and inasmuch as she is—like the Donne Gentili of the *Vita Nova* and the *Convivio*—a version of the seductive “other woman” of vernacular tradition, as well

as of the heroines of the carnal and ill-fated classical romances to which she is compared, he might be expected to turn away from her.²⁸ The references to impending disasters (Proserpina's rape, the deaths of Adonis and Leander), however, are perhaps occasions of representation by unwished-for contrary. The pilgrim does not turn away from Matelda, nor is his failure to do so a bad thing in this context. As in his friend Guido's *pastorelle*, the desire that he feels for the maiden is apparently reciprocated. We are in Eden, where sex and erotic longing are without sin, and no longer hold only suffering in store. Dante's will has returned to its unfallen state; Virgilio has declared it "libero, dritto e sano," and that it would be wrong not to act according to its pleasure (*Purg.* 27:140–41). In the *Vita Nova*, the poet defined the original goal of all his desires as residing in "lo saluto di questa donna" (10:6), a goal which he subsequently had to renounce. Now that he is under the sway of intellect, rather than appetite, he no longer has to renounce his desires, which consist in the mind's pure inclination toward the good (see *Purg.* 16:85–90; 18:22–33). Matelda satisfies his request that she approach, and gives him the compassionate reciprocation that he has always wanted. Whether or not he and the lady actually have intercourse seems to me beside the point.²⁹

The pilgrim likens Matelda to Proserpina "nel tempo che perdette / la madre lei, ed ella primavera" (28:50–51). In the classical myth, however, Proserpina's mother, Ceres, eventually recovers her daughter from the underworld for half of the year, during which time the earth recovers its fertility (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 5:564 ff.). If Matelda is like Proserpina, then she is also to be identified with the spring season itself, as well as with the returning flowers, the violets or white lilies that Proserpina was gathering—and lost—at the time of her ravishment.³⁰ And this general identification of the beloved with the spring and spring flowers carries us back once more to the lyrics of Dante's "first friend" Cavalcanti—not so much to the "pastorelle" that I have already discussed, but to the more conventionally courtly poems for his lady "Primavera." The refrain of one *ballata* begins, for instance, with the address:

Fresca rosa novella,
piacente primavera
per prata e per rivera
gaiamente cantando [. . .] (*Poeti* 2:491)

The representation of the desired object as a rose may seem somewhat banal at this point—also see the Sicilian poet Cielo d'Alcamo's "Rosa

fresca aulentissima" (*Poeti* 1:177), for instance—but Guido makes it new by not merely associating the act of falling in love with warm weather and roses, but suggesting that the lady herself is Spring, with all its attributes. He begins another poem, a sonnet, by affirming "Avete 'n vo' li fior' e la verdura" (2:493). Dante appears to have picked up this identification of the lady with the verdant landscape in which she resides, not only in his likening of Matelda to Proserpina, but also in his depiction of her as laughing (28:67; compare Matelda's characterization of Adam's brief time in the garden as "onesto riso e dolce gioco," 28:96), and in her own averment, "qui primavera sempre" (28:143). Whereas Cavalcanti's lady surpasses all the evanescent ladies of earlier lyric (they were only situated in the spring, while Giovanna is the spring), Dante's Matelda surpasses her, as eternal spring.³¹

As has already been established, however, Matelda is, in her turn, only a precursor herself. Critics (see especially Pietrobono) have also long associated her with Guido's lady Giovanna as she appears in the *Vita Nova*, where Dante sees her preceding Beatrice on the street and says that she is called "Primavera" or "prima verrà" for that one reason, just as she is called Giovanna because the name "è da quello Giovanni lo quale precedette la verace luce" (15:4). Matelda, too, plays John-the-Baptist to Beatrice's Christ, performing the purification of baptism that is prerequisite to the union with divine love symbolized by the Eucharist (Fairchild 150). And just as Dante was aroused by Matelda's apparition, he is supremely aroused by that of Beatrice; upon seeing her, he turns to Virgilio to say that not a drop of blood is left in him that does not tremble, for he knows "i segni de l'antica fiamma" (30:46–48), echoing the words spoken by Dido, Dante's paramount representative of sensuality, in reference to her rekindled desire for Aeneas. Once again, this is not a bad thing: Dante's attraction to Matelda and subsequently to Beatrice is the informed soul's turning toward the good, and leads him not back downward to Hell (as in Proverbs 7:27), but both literally and figuratively upward to Heaven, from the profane to the sacred, the creature to the Creator.

Unlike Matelda, who appears laughing and happy—not to mention gratifyingly compassionate—from the pilgrim's first vision of her, when Beatrice arrives in canto 30, she expresses no joy at encountering the one who has come so far to see her. As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, this contrasts with what the pilgrim and the reader have been led to expect of the reunion. The first of the Latin phrases presaging her

advent, “Veni, sponsa, de Libano,” likens her to the bride of the Song of Songs, who expresses ardent longing to be reunited with her lover (1:1–6 and *passim*). Beatrice also appears veiled, as a bride, and surrounded by “una nuvola di fiori” (30:28; cf. Song 2:5: “fulcite me floribus”). Like that of the *sponsa*, her arrival is compared to that of the sun at dawn:

Io vidi già nel cominciar del giorno
la parte oriental tutta rosata,
e l'altro ciel di bel sereno addorno;
e la faccia del sol nascere ombrata . . . (*Purg.* 30:22–25).

Compare the Song's rhetorical question: “Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?” (6:9). Beatrice's light is tempered by vapors at first, so that the eye can sustain it, but then shines forth *electa ut sol*, and, even more to the point, *terribilis ut acies ordinata*. She turns her speech against the pilgrim, telling him not to weep for Virgilio's departure, but rather for something more serious—“per altra spada” (30:57)—like an admiral admonishing the troops that serve under him (“Quasi ammiraglio . . .”; 30:58 ff.).³²

The same verse from the Song of Songs is echoed in the sonnet by Cavalcanti that begins, “Chi è questa che vèn, ch'ogn'om la mira, / che fa tremar di chiarezza l'are . . . ?” (*Poeti* 2:495; cf. also Song 3:6 and 8:5). Dante's lady is the fulfillment of Guido's lady, who makes the air tremble with clarity. Guido's lady is not only awe-inspiring, however, but also filled with compassion and benevolence: “cotanto d'umiltà donna mi pare, / ch'ogn'altra ver' di lei i' la chiam' ira” (vv. 7–8). Beatrice, too, is supremely benevolent, but she seems stern and distant at first. This can be accounted for in part, as we have seen, by her allegorical association with the Biblical figure of Wisdom, who is wearisome and unpleasant to begin with, but eventually becomes a source of comfort and joy (Ecclus. 6:21–31).³³ Philosophy is also depicted, in Dante's allegorical exposition of “Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete” in the *Convivio*, as “dur[a] . . . ne la prima entrare” (2.12.4). Later in the treatise, Dante explains and excuses a poetic characterization of the lady as “fera e disdegnosa” in another *canzone* as follows: “Dove è da sapere che dal principio essa filosofia pareva a me, quanto da la parte del suo corpo, cioè sapienza, fiera, ché non mi ridea, in quanto le sue persuasioni ancora non intendea; e disdegnosa, che

non mi volgea l'occhio, cioè ch'io non potea vedere le sue dimostrazioni: e di tutto questo lo difetto era dal mio lato" (3.15.19). Understood allegorically, the Donna Gentile, Filosofia, does not initially smile at the speaker or look him in the eyes because he is not able to understand her, nor does Beatrice, because what she has to reveal is, presumably, even harder for him to grasp.

But Beatrice is cruel and haughty in *Purgatorio* 30 also because she is angry with Dante, and she is angry because he scorned her for another woman. In this she recalls the disdainful ladies of the troubadour biographies who refuse to pardon their lovers for their infidelities except when others intervene on the lovers' behalf. Beatrice makes the point not just that Dante loved her first and that she represented for him the "sommo piacer," the greatest beauty available on earth, so that he had no reason ever to desire—or praise—anything else (31:49–54), but that she loved him in his youth, and appreciated his potential for good: "questi fu tal ne la sua Vita Nova / virtüalmente, ch'ogne abito destro / fatto averebbe in lui mirabil prova" (30:115–17). When their love was reciprocal, she did not disdain to show him her eyes or to accept his courtship: "Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto: / mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui, / meco il menava in dritta parte vòlto" (30:121–23). Gazing at her face and into her eyes, he was turned "in dritta parte," toward virtue and God. He had no motive to doubt or to test her love; he should have had faith. But when she died, his faith faltered, and he turned aside "per via non vera" in pursuit of those false images of good that never wholly keep their promises (30:124–32); as the pilgrim himself later confesses, "Le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer volser miei passi" (31:34–35). In his election of present things ("col falso lor piacer") over future ones (or the "sommo piacer"), we are reminded again of those troubadour *razos* in which the poet's love for the beloved goes without reward for so long that he turns to praise another, apparently more merciful, lady, who promises him pleasure in love—but breaks her promise.

Beatrice, the primary beloved, did not give up on Dante right away, however; she recounts how she called him back "in sogno e altrimenti," and finally went so far as to descend to hell, in tears, to beg Virgilio to conduct him to her (30:133–41.). This is a reference back to *Inferno* 2, where Virgilio responds to Dante's doubts by relating how a lady whose eyes shone "più che la stella" (cf. Reason in the *Roman* and Cavalcanti's "In un boschetto") came to him in Limbo and tearfully asked him to help

her friend escape from his impasse. Virgilio also refers to this scene again in *Purgatorio* 27, when he tells the pilgrim that he may explore the Earthly Paradise as he pleases “[m]entre che vegnan lieti li occhi belli / che, lagrimando, a te venir mi fenno” (136–37). The beauty of her eyes is not merely emphasized here, but Beatrice’s entire person is synecdochally referred to by her beautiful eyes. The fact that these eyes are crying when she appeals to Virgilio characterizes her feelings for Dante as sympathetic and compassionate. Jacoff (5) notes that each of the three times that Dante refers to Beatrice’s tears, he uses a present participle (“lacrimando” or “piangendo”). She connects this grammatical detail to a similar use of the participle in Jeremiah 31:15 (“Rachel plorantis filios suos”), where Rachel intervenes posthumously on behalf of her children, the Jews, on their way into Babylonian exile. In Christian typological analysis, Rachel weeping for her children can figurally anticipate both the Virgin Mary’s *pietà*, mourning her dead son, and the tears of Mater Ecclesia, lamenting her sons lost to sin or interceding for their salvation (see, for instance, Jacopone da Todi’s *lauda* “Plange la Chesia”; *Poeti* 2.78–81).

As we have seen, Beatrice is frequently associated in the *Commedia* with the Biblical figure of Rachel, Hebrew matriarch and Jacob’s beloved, both metaphorically in the dream of Leah and Rachel in *Purgatorio* 27 and literally in her celestial placement beside Rachel in the white rose of the Empyrean (see *Inf.* 2:102 and *Par.* 32:7–9). Robert Hollander (*Allegory in Dante’s “Commedia”* 91) has also connected her compassionate visit to Virgilio in Limbo, “li occhi lucenti lacrimando,” to a comparable moment in the first book of Virgil’s *Aeneid* in which Venus appeals to Jupiter for the safety of her son Aeneas, her bright eyes brimming with tears (“lacrimis oculos suffusa nitentis”; 1:228). Beatrice herself goes on her mission of mercy before the poem opens, thus setting the action in motion, at the insistence of a “Donna [. . .] gentil nel ciel che sì compiangi / di questo ’mpedimento ov’io ti mando, / sì che duro giudicio là sù frange,” i.e. Mary (*Inf.* 2:94–96; emphasis mine). What Rachel, Venus, and Mary—as well as the Church (which Beatrice also figures in part)—have in common, aside from their *miser cordia*, is that they are all mothers. Beatrice, too, is compared to a mother when she alights on the summit of Purgatory: “Così la madre al figlio par superba, / com’ ella parve a me; perché d’amaro / sente il sapor de la pietade acerba” (30:79–81). I have already related the bitter and unripe flavor of her pity here (compare the angelic sweetness of her pity in *Inferno* 2) to her allegorical association

with Biblical Wisdom, who is difficult to submit to at first, and with the hard choice of virtue at the fork in the Pythagorean Y. The overall pattern of Beatrice's compassion for her devotee, however, is not so much that of absence then presence, but the tri-fold one of presence, departure, and subsequent return. For she explicitly states that she was moved by love in the beginning ("amor mi mosse"; *Inf.* 2:72), much like her typological fulfillment and superior, the Donna Gentil of heaven who had such pity for the pilgrim that she was moved to break God's "duro giudicio."³⁴

Also in this, Beatrice resembles Wisdom, who was with God when he prepared the heavens, playing in the world and delighting to be with the children of men (Prov. 8:27–31), but threatens to withdraw from those whom she addresses as children when they refuse her and neglect her instruction (Prov. 1:20ff.). In the *Convivio*, Dante exhorts us not to flee Sapienza-Filosofia, "ché, innanzi che voi foste, ella fu amatrice di voi, acconciando e ordinando lo vostro processo; e, poi che fatti foste, per voi dirizzare, in vostra similitudine venne a voi" (3.15.17). Wisdom loved men first and prepared the way for them, but they went astray, so she then came as Christ, in human form, in order to straighten them out again. The woman who loved us, even before we were born, before we loved her, is not by implication a bride (except of God the father), but a mother. Beatrice, who comes as Wisdom-Christ, is both the Bride of the Song of Songs (in allegory the Church or the individual human soul) and a stern mother, disciplining her child.³⁵ At the conclusion of Beatrice's accusations and the pilgrim's confession, he stands "[q]uali fanciulli, vergognando, muti / con li occhi a terra stannosi, ascoltando / e sé riconoscendo e ripentuti," but then Beatrice implicitly asks her charge to behave like an adult, rather than a child, with the phrase "alza la barba" (31:64–68). Hollander (*Allegory* 168) relates this command to Marco Lombardo's description of the simple little soul at birth who innocently "pargoleggia" ("acts childishly"; *Purg.* 16:87), and to Beatrice's complaint that Dante should not have been hampered in his upward flight by a "pargoletta" (31:59). He points out parallels with the language of 1 Corinthians 13:11: "When I was a child [*parvulus*], I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But, when I became a man, I put away the things of a child." Perhaps even more relevant is Wisdom's question in Proverbs 1:22: "O children, how long will you love childishness, and fools covet those things which are hurtful to themselves, and the unwise hate knowledge?"³⁶ Beatrice orders the pilgrim to stop being the child or imprudent fool who runs after trifling or injurious goods.

Earlier in the canto, Beatrice demands Dante's confession by asking him what impediments there were within the desire for her that was leading him to love the supreme good and what attractions in the face of others that obliged him to court them or promenade before them ("lor passeggiare anzi"; 31:22–30). Addressing him here as her suitor, not child, she makes reference to the lovers' custom of frequently passing back and forth before the beloved's house or under her window. This seems another echo of the episode of the *Vita Nova* in which the "gentil donna" looks down on him from a window compassionately (cf. Gorni 92). The protagonist of the *libello* apparently returns repeatedly to the place where the lady can look down on him and he can look up at her, for he remarks that "molte volte [. . .] io andava per vedere questa pietosa donna" (25:1). He eventually finds that returning to see her has such a strange effect on him "che molte volte ne pensava sì come di persona che troppo mi piacesse" (27:1). This observation runs parallel to the moment to which the pilgrim alludes when he confesses in tears: "Le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer volser miei passi" (*Purg.* 31:34–35). The pleasure offered by the "pietosa donna" was false and fleeting, or, as the poet himself calls it in the episode's palinode, "desiderio malvagio e vana tentatione" (28:6).

This is not the only version of the Donna Gentile story rehearsed in this part of the *Commedia*, however; an earlier passage, in *Purgatorio* 30, may be taken as a recapitulation of the same episode *in bono*. The moment that Beatrice first reappears, Virgilio disappears, and the pilgrim bursts into tears, but Beatrice reprimands him harshly for his weakness and for thinking himself worthy of acceding to happiness. Dante is paralyzed with shame and it is at this point that Beatrice is compared to a proud, severe mother. When she falls silent, the angels who heralded her arrival are said to sing Psalm 30, "In te Domine speravi," up to verse 9. I cite this section of the Psalm in full (Dante only alludes to it by citing the first and last words):

In thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded: deliver me in thy justice. Bow down thy ear to me: make haste to deliver me. Be thou unto me a God, a protector, and a house of refuge, to save me. For thou art my strength and my refuge; and for thy name's sake thou wilt lead me, and nourish me. Thou wilt bring me out of this snare, which they have hidden for me: for thou art my protector. Into thy hands I commend my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth. Thou hast hated them that regard vanities, to no purpose. But I have hoped in the Lord: I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy. For thou hast

regarded my humility, thou hast saved my soul out of distresses. And thou hast not shut me up in the hands of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a spacious place.

With their sweet song, the angels appear to be taking up Dante's defense for him and justifying his ascent to the mountaintop. They say, in effect, he never assumed that he deserved redemption, but—in words echoed by Christ on the cross (Luke 23:46)—he entrusted his spirit to God (in the person of His delegate Beatrice) and hoped for His/her *misericordia*. It is not Beatrice, however, who acts as God's minister here by showing the pilgrim mercy, but the angels themselves (see 30:18, where they are described as “ministri e messaggier di vita eterna”). When Dante hears them taking his part (“lor compartire a me”), it seems to him as if they had asked Beatrice why she needed to dishearten and humiliate him so (“Donna, perché sì lo stempre?”), and moved by their compassion, the ice that hardened around his heart melts into tears and sighs (30:94–99).³⁷

Numerous commentators (e.g. Fido 73–74) have likened this moment to the one in *Vita Nova* 24 in which Dante sees the Donna Gentile looking down with pity on his “vile vita” and, feeling more sorry for himself than ever, is moved to tears. Francesco Mazzoni takes his distance from this standard gloss, however, denying that Dante's tears in this canto can be “frutto d'autocommiseraazione” and connecting the language, rather, to a passage in Psalm 147 that Christian exegetes interpreted as referring to the conversion of a sinner (see especially verse 18: “He shall send out his word, and shall melt them: his wind shall blow, and the waters shall run”). According to Mazzoni, Dante weeps now not because he is moved by the angels' compassion, but because of his new-found certainty, after their song of hope and their exhortation to Beatrice, that he is predestined to be saved (211). In other words, he weeps for joy. It strikes me as a little early for him to be rejoicing, however, for the worst is yet to come: Beatrice still has not turned against him the sharp point of her accusations, but has used only the edge (31:2–3), and Dante still has not confessed his fault, as he will in the next canto, with more tears and sighs (31:19ff.). Nor do I believe that the poet ever gives up his courtly and Romance models, although this may be another case of representation by contrary, in which the poem's “dream content” is associated with its opposite, without negation being provided. The angels temper Beatrice's severity and console the lover for his lady's disdain, just as the “donna pietosa”

consoled him for Beatrice's death in the *Vita Nova*; indeed, they are described as "sustanze pie" (30:101), an epithet that connects them to Matelda as well. Does this mean that he commits an act of infidelity in allowing himself to be consoled by them? No, because the "pietas" they furnish—like Matelda's—is not sexual gratification, but Christian piety.

Not that erotic desire, directed rightly, is generally represented as a bad thing in the *Commedia*. As Paul Priest points out (84), another Biblical passage relevant to Dante's comparison of the pilgrim's tears to the melting of congealed snow ("Si come neve tra le vive travi / per lo dosso d'Italia si congela, / [. . .] / poi liquefatta, in sé stessa trapela . . ."; 30:85–88) is Song of Songs 5:6: "Anima mea liquefacta est ut locutus est" ("My soul melted when he spoke"). It is worth stepping back here, and reading some of the verses that surround this excerpt:

My beloved put his hand through the key hole, and my bowels were moved at his touch. [. . .] I opened the bolt of my door to my beloved: but he had turned aside, and was gone. My soul melted when he spoke: I sought him, and found him not: I called, and he did not answer me. The keepers that go about the city found me: they struck me: and wounded me: the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I languish with love. (Song of Songs 5:4–8)

The trembling of the speaker's *venter* or womb and the subsequent removal of her *pallium* or mantle may be ironically recalled in the unveiling of the Siren's malodorous *ventre* in the dream of *Purgatorio* 19. The speaking voice here does not principally assume, however, the point of view of the male protagonist who must choose between two objects of desire, in this case, the "femmina balba," disguised as a beautiful siren, or the "donna . . . santa e presta," but assumes, rather, a female identity, akin to that of the prophets' personified Jerusalem, who in Ezekiel 16 and elsewhere is denuded as punishment for her infidelities to God.³⁸

Dante the pilgrim, until now a Christian Hercules actively choosing between paths and beloveds, has become like snow melting in Beatrice's presence, like a candle melted by her flame ("sì che par foco fonder la candela"; 30:90), like the beloved of the Song of Songs whose bowels quake at her sacred lover's touch. Compare this verse, "dilectus meus misit manum suam per foramen et venter meus intremuit ad tactum eius" (Song 5:4), with the lines that Dante means to address to Virgilio at Beatrice's advent: "Men che dramma / di sangue m'è rimaso che non

tremi: / conosco i segni de l'antica fiamma" (30:46–48; emphases mine).³⁹ But Virgilio, to whom he now turns as a child runs to his mother, disappears at this very moment, and so, in a sense, does Beatrice. Dante opens his door for her, but the compassionate beloved whom he expects is not there; his soul melts when she speaks, but he seeks and does not find her, he calls and she does not answer. In this, Beatrice also assumes once more the role of Wisdom who threatens her children in Proverbs that because they have not listened to her, "when tribulation and distress shall come upon you: then shall you call upon me, and I will not hear" (1:27–28), as well as that of Jesus who pronounces judgment on Jerusalem and threatens to withdraw (Matt. 23:37–39; Luke 13:34–35). Dante, the chosen one, virtuous in his youth "per larghezza di grazie divine" (30:112), is now, like Jerusalem the beloved, punished for his infidelities, for playing the harlot. The female speaker in the Song of Songs asks the "filiae Hirusalem" to intervene on her behalf with her "dilectus" (Christ or the Word in medieval exegesis)—as a Christian might pray to a patron saint, such as Lucia, or to the Virgin Mary for intercession. The pilgrim, too, needs outside mediation if he is to win back his beloved's good graces, and the role of the intercessor—a sort of redeemed *Galeotto*—is played in this scene by the sympathetic angels.

I made the statement a short while ago, however, that I do not believe the poet ever gives up his courtly and Romance models. Another paradigm that Dante clearly exploits in *Purgatorio* 30–31 is the common *razo* plot-structure, delineated at the beginning of this chapter, in which the lover turns from one lady to another who promises to concede her favors, but is disappointed by the second lady and eventually returns to the first with the help of an intermediary. A particularly colorful variant of this narrative—which Dante may well have known, since a rendition of it circulated in Duecento Tuscany as *novella* 64 of *Il novellino*—is *razo* B for Richart de Berbezill (mentioned earlier). In this story, the troubadour is seduced away from his original beloved by a lady who proclaims herself more beautiful and noble, but he is then rejected by the second lady, who says that if he betrayed such a worthy lady he will betray another. Richart wants to re-enter the first lady's service at this point, but she will not have him, so he retires, dejected, to a house in a wood from which he says he will not depart until his lady forgives him. The ladies and knights of the region beg her to pardon him, but she refuses to do so unless one hundred ladies and one hundred knights, all of whom are true lovers ("li

qual s'amesson tuit per amor") [16.B.17], cry for mercy on bended knee.⁴⁰ The spectacular participation of one hundred female and one hundred male courtly lovers (rather than just one middle person) in the troubadour's redemption may have suggested Dante's numerical specification in *Purgatorio* 30:17–18 of one hundred angels ("cento . . . / ministri e messaggier di vita eterna"), all crying "Benedictus qui venis!"—the words that Jesus insists upon hearing before he will return to Jerusalem (Matt. 23:39; Luke 13.35).

The restoration of Beatrice's good will and compassion, of the beati-fier's blessing, is played out in the unveiling of her eyes and smile in the subsequent canto. Following Beatrice's accusations, the pilgrim stands looking at the ground, mute and ashamed, but she commands him to look up. He sees the angels ("quelle prime creature") first and then Beatrice looking toward the pageant at the griffin, whose double nature, half eagle and half lion, makes him a symbol for Christ, who is both human and divine. Unlike the Siren ("l'antica strega") of Dante's second dream, when Beatrice's form is perceived unveiled she is revealed to be even more beautiful than imagined: "Sotto 'l velo e oltre la rivera / vincer pariemmi più se stessa antica, / vincer che l'altre qui, quand' ella c'era" (31;83–84). The speaker sets up an equation: the amount by which Beatrice's celestial beauty surpasses the beauty she had on earth is greater than that by which her earthly beauty surpassed that of other women. Just as she was then their perfection or culmination, so now she comes as the fulfillment of what she herself only prefigured in life.⁴¹ The pilgrim repents at this point for ever having looked at another woman—or turned away from God—and faints with contrition. When he wakes up, Matelda, the principal intermediary figure in the Earthly Paradise (itself an intermediary place in Dante's geography), is dragging him through the river Lethe. We go through a series of intercessors at this stage, however. Matelda escorts the penitent to the dance of the "quattro belle" (in allegory, the cardinal virtues) who proclaim that they are Beatrice's handmaids and will bring the pilgrim to her eyes, but that the three nymphs dancing on the other side of the chariot (the theological virtues) will sharpen his sight for to the light therein. Dante at last gazes on his beloved's "smeraldi" with a thousand desires hotter than flame, and sees the shifting nature of the twofold griffin reflected in them. Beatrice herself assumes a mediatory role here between the pilgrim and the divine, a role she will continue to

assume throughout the *Paradiso*. The other three nymphs then come forward and implore Beatrice to turn to look at her “fedele” (a word with both courtly and religious connotations) and to unveil—“disvele”—to him her beautiful smile, which she finally does (31:133–45).

Dante has already laid out a similar progression from the beauty of the lady’s eyes to that of her mouth in *Vita Nova* 10 in the ground-breaking *canzone*, “Donne ch’avete intellecto d’amore,” later cited by the character Bonagiunta da Lucca in *Purgatorio* 24 as the inaugural poem of the *Dolce stil novo*. The novelty of “Donne ch’avete,” according to the speaker of the *Vita Nova*, is that it takes as its exclusive subject matter “quelle parole che lodano la donna mia” (10:8), rather than those words which seek to solicit “lo saluto di questa donna” or any sort of reciprocity in the lovers’ relationship, such as implicitly sought by a description of the lover’s own state or the effects of love on him. Dante may have renounced the possibility of intercourse in this poem, however, but the angels in heaven apparently have not: “Lo cielo, che non àve altro difecto / che d’aver lei, al suo Segnor la chiede, / e ciascun sancto ne gridà merzede” (10:18). I cannot help but be reminded of the hundreds of barons, knights, ladies, and damsels in *Novellino* 64, “che tutti gridino a una boce merzè . . .” (Boutiere-Schutz 597), and to wonder what it means when Dante replays such a scene at the top of Mount Purgatory, with the hundred angels all shouting Latin phrases bidding Beatrice to appear (30:10–21), and the three nymphs later begging her to do them the grace (“Per grazia fa noi grazia”) of uncovering her mouth for him (31:133–38).

In passing from Matelda and all the other intercessory figures in the Earthly Paradise finally to Beatrice and the Heavenly Paradise, Dante appears to loosely recapitulate the “conversion” which took place in the *Vita Nova* from lyrics expressing the conventional courtly expectation of the *guiderdone*, or reward, to a poetics of pure praise. This passage is also obliquely reflected in the progression from eyes to mouth. Although the mouth may be seen as the very embodiment of reciprocation, for, indeed, the bliss that was the goal of the lover’s desires initially rested in the beloved’s greeting, this interpretation is belied in “Donne ch’avete.” Let us examine the relevant verses:

Degli occhi suoi, com ch’ella li mova,
escono spirti d’amore inflammati,
che fèron gli occhi a qual che allor la guati,

e passan sì che 'l cor ciascun ritrova.
Voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso,
là ove non pò alcun mirarla fiso. (*Vita Nova* 10:23)

Whereas there still exists a sort of dialogue between the lady's eyes and the eyes (and heart) of those who look at her—which exchange is expressed here with the familiar image of flames—no one dares even to gaze fixedly (for fear of being blinded?) at the ultimate “fine d’amore,” the lady's mouth (10:31).

The passage from eyes to mouth also shows up in the second *canzone* of the *Convivio*, “Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona,” in which the poet claims that things appear in his lady's eyes and smile “che mostran de' piacer di Paradiso,” but since he cannot fix his gaze on them (“perch'io non le posso mirar fiso”), he will have to be content to say little about them (vv. 55–62). The beloved of “Amor che ne la mente” is treated in much the same terms as Beatrice in “Donne ch'avete”—she is a paradigm of beauty, admired by the angels in heaven, her influence passes through the eyes of those who look at her to their hearts, and so forth—but as the Donna Gentile, Lady Philosophy, she is also Divina Sapienza, “da eterno ordinata,” directly conceived by “Chi mosse l'universo” (vv. 54 and 72).⁴² In his allegorical exposition of this poem, Dante explains “che li occhi de la Sapienza sono le sue dimostrazioni, con le quali si vede la veritate certissimamente; e lo suo riso sono le sue persuasioni, ne le quali si dimostra la luce interiore de la Sapienza sotto alcuno velamento: e in queste due cose si sente quel piacere altissimo di beatitudine, lo quale è massimo bene in Paradiso” (3.15.2). Whereas we can see clearly Wisdom's logical “demonstrazioni” (her “eyes”) as clear and certain evidence, we can only intuit her rhetorical “persuasioni” (her “smile”) indirectly, by way of such imaginative and allusive procedures as metaphor and allegory. Philosophy's smile, on which no one can fix his gaze, is that which we cannot arrive at by indisputable theoretical arguments, but only by probable and rhetorically persuasive ones.⁴³

When Beatrice descends to the summit of Purgatory, she takes over many of the Donna Gentile's attributes as Wisdom-Philosophy, especially, as we have seen, that of being difficult and demanding at first approach: “dura ne la prima entrare,” “fiera . . . in quanto le sue persuasioni ancora non intendea; e disdegnosa . . . cioè ch'io non potea vedere le sue dimostrazioni.” As such, she apparently returns as the ally of Reason, like

Dante's "forte ymaginatione" of her in *Vita Nova* 28:1. But if the Donna Gentile—who is Lady Philosophy—is one of the referents of the *pargoletta* of *Purg.* 31:59 (as she surely is), and if Philosophy thus represents a "via non vera," "imagini di ben," rather than real ones and "falso piacer" rather than true, then Beatrice also returns this time as an "adversario della Ragione" (*Vita Nova* 28:1), with all the implicit criticism of the limitations of secular philosophy, of its inadequacy as a means for satisfying our desire for supernatural happiness, that this entails (see Freccero 190; Shoaf 63–66). Beatrice—or, more particularly, her smile—represents an objective that transcends the perimeters of reason and classical philosophy, a beatitude that man in the natural order, in this life, cannot experience. One of the textual passages that serves as background for our poet is clearly the opening of the *Consolation*, although he appears to reverse some of its implicit value judgments: whereas Boethius' *Philosophia* cast out the Muses of secular poetry, the Boethian lady of the *Convivio* is herself rightfully dispelled by Dante's muse, Beatrice. Let us recall, however, that another important model for Dante—and one that does not seem to necessitate a radical reversal of the paradigm—is the lover's refusal of the counsel of Reason in the *Roman de la Rose*. Dante's lover also ultimately rejects reason, and puts his faith in that goal which man can never fully know by way of his own innate rationality but must reach by way of a gratuitous intervention from above, or Christian grace.

When the pilgrim is brought before Beatrice in *Purgatorio* 31, his eyes are drawn to her shining eyes, and in them he gazes on and marvels at "[c]ome in lo specchio il sol . . . la doppia fiera [che] dentro vi raggiava" (121–22). Here he sees the double nature of Christ as we do in this life "per speculum in enigmate," but when she turns so that he can see her "facie ad faciem" (1 Cor. 13:12) and discloses her mouth, he can no longer relate what he sees in human language, for his mind is encumbered (139–45). We already learned in the two *canzoni*, "Donne ch'avete" and "Amor che ne la mente," that the lover dares not fix his gaze at the ultimate goal of love, the lady's mouth, and thus can say little about it.⁴⁴ Dante's recourse to the ineffability topos again here suggests that the pilgrim—or, perhaps, we the readers—are not yet ready to see Absolute Truth, "la luce interiore de la Sapienza," without her veil. At the beginning of the next canto, the lover gazes, his eyes "fissi e attenti," at the beloved's "santo riso," until the three goddesses representing the theological virtues complain of his staring: "Troppo fiso!" they warn (32:1–9).

At this point, Dante loses his sight momentarily, as if blinded by the sun. The pilgrim will need almost another entire canticle to prepare him to be able to sustain her smile at any length. Twice more, once in *Paradiso* 23, in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars, he will complain of the impossibility of expressing the beauty of her “santo riso”: “e così, figurando il paradiso / convien saltar lo sacrato poema” (61–62), and again, as late as *Paradiso* 30, in the Empyrean:

Da questo passo vinto mi concedo
[. . .]
ché, come sole in viso che più trema,
così lo rimembrar del dolce riso
la mente mia da me medesimo scema. (22–27)

Beatrice’s ineffable smile is conflated with the very “piacer di Paradiso,” which we can conceive in this life only indirectly and by way of such “persuasive” procedures as metaphor and allegory.⁴⁵ Dante is not able to sustain—or express—Beatrice’s smile until *Paradiso* 31, when he sees her from a distance (but distinctly and without obstacle) turn to look back on him from the height of the Celestial Rose and turn again to the eternal fountain (91–93), upon which the pilgrim is by then nearly ready to fix his own gaze.

Dante inherited the traditional Romance topos of the lover confronting a number of different women to whom he is sexually attracted and choosing between them. But Dante’s erotic choice is also, in allegory, an ethical one, and in selecting Beatrice he opts for sacred rather than profane love. In his positive valuation of inherited tradition, the consummation of profane desire is not a bad thing, however; one kind of love leads to the other, Matelda to Beatrice, reason to grace. This passage from a duality to a unity that encompasses both alternatives is recapitulated in the repeated motif of the passage of the lover’s gaze from the beloved’s eyes to her mouth. Like God, the lady’s face is a trinity that resolves itself in oneness.

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NOTES

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1. "Omnis mortalium cura quam multiplicium studiorum labor exercet, diverso quidem calle procedit, sed ad unum tamen beatitudinis finem nititur pervenire" (3.p.2).

2. According to the early Christian humanist Lactantius, the ancient philosophers knew "that the way marked by virtues was arduous and difficult at the first approach, but that if anyone should come to its summit after overcoming the difficulty, he would have a smooth way for the rest of the journey, and that he would gain a light and pleasant field and rich and delightful rewards of all his labors" (396). Cf. *Ecclus.* 6: 25–32.

3. I refer to the numerical system established in Guglielmo Gorni's 1996 edition.

4. Beatrice's self-identification on the mountaintop ("Ben son, ben son Beatrice," *Purg.* 30:73) can be read as an affirmation that she is the good. On the symbolic identities of the Donna Gentile and the Beatrice of the *Vita Nova*, see especially Fenzi, "Costanza de la ragione"; Harrison 110–17.

5. Dante would have known this story principally by way of Cicero's *De officiis*, in which it is recounted that when Hercules was just becoming a young man, he went out to a lonely place and pondered which road to take, for he could see two: one of pleasure and another of virtue ("unam Voluptatis, alteram Virtutis"; 1.32.118). The two alternatives are not explicitly personified as two women in the *De officiis*, but they are in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, which Cicero cites as his source.

6. "Occitan" refers to a Romance language spoken in southern France since the Middle Ages in which the affirmative particle "yes" is expressed by the word "oc"; I use this designation in preference to the more old-fashioned (and geographically misleading) term "Provençal." Of the approximately 95 Old Occitan songbooks that have come down to us, 52—more than half—were actually produced in Italy (Avalle 25).

7. See, for instance, the *razos* for Richart de Berbezill (B), Savaric de Malleo (B), Uc de Saint Circ (B), Pons de Capdoill (B), and Raimon de Miraval (D). These *razos*—with the exception of the final one for Raimon de Miraval, in which the beloved is not recovered—generally adhere to the second of the two basic narrative schemes that Maria Luisa Meneghetti sees as underlying most of the *vidas* and *razos*, i.e. "modello B," which she describes as follows: "1. miglioramento da ottenere > 2a. fallimento del progetto > 2b. peggioramento > 3. intervento di un prestatore > 4. ritorno alla situazione iniziale." She gives as example of a troubadour's initial "fallimento" his falling into the trap of "una proposta di diversivo sentimentale" (261–2).

8. See Paden. None of the troubadours mentioned in the previous note is among those discussed in Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, for instance. Salvatore Santangelo argued some time ago that Dante probably did not know the extant *vidas* of even those authors whom he cites, but deduces that he may have drawn on a manuscript containing troubadour commentary, now lost.

9. See Schutz; Meneghetti 237–42. It is also worth pointing out that since the *razos* are generally based on the songs that they are meant to introduce—indeed, they are often rather pedestrian narrativizations of the symbolic imagery of the lyric texts—their general themes and schemes, such as the notion of erotic choice, are also present *in nuce* in the songs themselves.

10. Freud found that dreams for the most part disregard contraries and contradictories, as well as logical relations such as those represented by the conjunctions "if," "because," "just as," and "although"; even negation seems not to exist in them. Thus the alternative "either/or" cannot be expressed, but both alternatives are usually inserted into the dream as though they were equally valid. See his *Interpretation of Dreams* 347–53.

11. Most critics accept the attribution to this troubadour of both the compilation and composition of a large proportion of the *vidas* and *razos*. Uc de Saint Circ apparently emigrated around 1219 from Occitania to Treviso, in northern Italy, where he seems to have spent the next forty years or so; linguistic research has established that virtually all of the *vidas* and *razos* were also compiled in the region of Treviso around that time. I discuss the evidence for attributing the majority of the troubadour commentaries to Uc—arguing that it is mostly circumstantial and inconclusive—in my *Assembling the Lyric Self* 25–30.

12. On Uc's constitutional unfaithfulness, see Meneghetti, who takes it as an ironically positive trait, enabling him to extract the maximum possible benefits from the "courtly system" (269).

13. The notion of Dante's "leaving the vulgar throng" refers to his moral and spiritual development under Beatrice's influence, but also to the fame that he acquired through writing poems in praise of her. In the *vidas* and *razos*, too, amorous relations are frequently described in terms of a troubadour's praising one lady or another; the medieval commentator thus interprets the poems literally, as historical acts of courtship, which have the effect of raising or lowering the poet's "worth" or reputation, as a function of the beloved's own value.

14. "[D]e fenestra enim domus meae per cancellos prospexi / et video parvulos considero vecordem iuvenem / qui transit in platea iuxta angulum et propter viam domus illius graditur" (Prov. 7:6–8).

15. See Proverbs 9:3 ("misit ancillas suas ut vocarent ad arcem et ad moenia civitatis") and Ecclesiastes 24:7 ("ego in altis habitavi / et thronus meus in columna nubis").

16. For specific textual parallels between the *Roman* and the *Commedia*, see Richards 71–105, and for parallels between the *Roman* and the *Vita Nova*, see Took. There remains no doubt that Dante knew the French poem, although the attribution to him—argued convincingly by Contini (see especially "Un nodo della cultura medievale")—of the *Fiore*, which translates much of the *Roman*, is still widely disputed. I have chosen not to discuss the *Fiore* here, not because I take any position on the issue of its authorship, but because the *Roman*'s allusions to Reason's tower and, indeed, almost all of Reason's theological and Sapiential connotations are suppressed in it (see Sebastio, especially 77). The *Fiore*'s Ragione does offer herself up to Amante to be his "amanza," however, in sonnets 41 and 44, and the sequence also contains repeated references to the notion of a "right road" (see sonnets 68, 69, 132, and 228; Vanossi 317).

17. Dante states explicitly in *Convivio* 3.14.9: "Per donna gentile s'intende la nobile anima d'ingegno, e libera ne la sua propria potestate, che è la ragione."

18. According to Earl Richards (98–100), the key textual parallel confirming Dante's allusion to the *Roman* at the climax of the *Commedia* is his employment of the Gallicism "oltraggio" in *Par.* 33:57, a word that is first attested in Italian in the *Fiore* and appears to enter the language specifically as a translation of the French "outrage," which occurs frequently in the *Roman* (but see especially v. 21,670). See also, more recently, Santa Casciani, for an extensive description of how "in the verses depicting the *Candida Rosa*, Dante 'adopts' and 'adapts' Jean de Meun's terminology of the closing scene of the *Rose*" (11). Lori Walters has shown that a spiritual interpretation of the French allegorical poem, in which "the search for the red flower, originally physical in nature, takes on religious or mystical connotations" (183), is also already evident in Gui de Mori's thirteenth-century rewriting of it, especially as represented in the illuminated manuscript 101 of the Municipal Library of Tournai, dated 1330.

19. The description of the Garden of Deduit, which occupies about 1,000 lines in Guillaume's part of the *Roman* (up to story of Narcissus), is also absent from the *Fiore*, which begins with the Lover's wounding by Love's arrows, an event which occurs at around v. 1690 of the *Roman*. Contini ("Un nodo" 305) notes that Dante does not ever seem to repeat the passages of the *Roman* that he

echoes, but distributes different features of the French poem throughout the *Commedia* and his minor works (among which he includes the *Fiore*).

20. Cf. Lady Philosophy's reference to her less righteous rivals, the Muses of poetry, as sirens in *Consolation* 1.p.1 and Nature's comparison of the vices to sirens who "lure their lovers to the shipwreck of idolatry" in Alan of Lille's *Plaint of Nature*, prose 6 (p. 170). Plato identifies the sirens with the music of the spheres in *Republic* 10.617b, however, and this is echoed in Macrobius 2.3.1 and picked up by the Christian tradition (see Boyance). Thus both negative and positive versions of the siren-myth were available in the Middle Ages.

21. See Curtius 195–200. Dronke (472–73) points out parallels also between Dante's *locus amoenus* and Alan of Lille's portrayal of the garden of Natura in *Anticlaudianus* 1.55ff.

22. The relation between the two gardens in the *Roman* might be compared to the allegory of the poets, in which a truth is disguised as a beautiful lie, whereas that between Dante's two gardens resembles more the allegory of the theologians, in which figure and fulfillment are both "true" (see *Convivio* 2.1.3–4).

23. Victoria Kirkham (414–15) points out that Dante also tropes Guido's adverbial doubling ("sola sola") in *Purg.* 28 with numerous similar duplications: the pilgrim's gait is "lento lento"; birds sing "di ramo in ramo"; the riverlet flows "bruna bruna"; Matelda gathers "fior da fiore" and walks "piede innanzi piede," etc.

24. *Poeti* 2:531. Neither this poem by Cavalcanti nor the next that I will discuss strictly adheres to the conventions of the genre, but I consider them both *pastorelle* because of the general pattern of the pastoral interlude in which the courtly lover looks to another lady, from outside the courtly sphere, for compassion and consolation for the refusals of his usual beloved. According to Teodolinda Barolini, "Cavalcanti's radical negativity, which he expounds in its theoretical dress in 'Donna me prega,' manifests itself in his apparently lighter pieces through his insistent recourse to mediation; the lady, whom he elsewhere proclaims to be unknowable, is in the sonnets and *ballate* simply rendered unknowable by the use of various other creatures, the 'giovane donna di Tolosa' and the 'foresette nove,' who displace her" (138).

25. Matelda's love is of the sort that is not lessened by being shared with a rival, but rather increased; it is that love "de la spera suprema" in which "per quanti si dice più li 'nostro,' / tanto possiede più di ben ciascuno" (*Purg.* 15:52–56). See also *Conv.* 3.15.10: "E questa è la ragione per che li Santi non hanno tra loro invidia, però che ciascuno aggiugne lo fine del suo desiderio, lo quale desiderio è con bontà de la natura misurato."

26. Robert Ball points out that "pietà" is a key word in the poetic lexicon of the *dolce stil nuovo*, and links Dante's uses of it to the Virgilian understanding of "pietas" as "the correct hierarchical relationship of a man to his superiors, and especially to father-figures: the gods, the head of the family, and the fatherland" (65). According to Ball, "Dante transcends the repetitive cycle of fathers and sons, not only by passing through the series of father-imagos which have ruled his past by means of their potentially unlimited authority, but also by adhering to a principle of female mediation [. . .]" (77). Dante himself says of the *pietade* that Virgil attributes to Aeneas: "non è pietade quella che crede la volgar gente, cioè dolersi de l'altrui male, anzi è questo uno suo speziale effetto, che si chiama misericordia ed è passione; ma pietade non è passione, anzi è una nobile disposizione d'animo, apparecchiata di ricevere amore, misericordia e altre caritative passioni" (*Conv.* 2.10.6). See also Renucci 286–88; Wilson–Okamura.

27. In the *Vita Nova*, the sonnet "Cavalcando l'altrier per un camino" (4:9–12) contains a number of markers belonging to the genre: the *incipit* "l'altrier," the speaker's arrival on horseback, etc. (see Spitzer 112–13). Its third verse, "trovai Amore in mezzo della via," also specifically recalls the diction of Cavalcanti's "In un boschetto trova' pasturella" and "Era in penser d'amore quand' i' trovai / due foresette nove"—and its first word, "Cavalcando," may even be a reference to the name Cavalcanti (Barolini 137). Dante replaces the pastoral love-object(s) with the personified abstraction "Amore," however. Both poets may be punning on the Occitan use of the verb *trobar* to mean "to compose poetry," as in Occitan *trobadors*, Italian *trovatore*. Cf. also *Inf.* 1:8: "ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai [. . .]"

28. It could also be argued that role of the "other woman" is filled in the Earthly Paradise by the absent, but unforgotten, Eve. See the poet's remark in *Purg.* 29:23ff. that "buon zelo / mi fè riprender l'ardimento d'Eva," where he suggests that if Eve had only been obedient, humanity might never have left Eden.

29. Thus I do not agree with Singleton's statement that "Dante's desire for this maiden cannot be that kind of desire which Guido had felt for his, and for the same reason that it may not be literally as Leander's for his beloved" (2:216), nor even with Emerson Brown's that "on the literal level the thoughts and words of the pilgrim on seeing Matelda reveal a limitation in his understanding of her and a residue of sensuality in his own soul" (42), let alone Marguerite Waller's assertion that the protagonist's "sexual attraction to a woman, once he is beyond what Dante calls sin, seems violently to disrupt his sense of being in tune with and in control of his world" (226). Despite the allusions to classical tales of discord and loss, I see no evidence in the canto of violent emotional disturbance or loss of control. Dante's love is fully sensual and, at the same time, a "moto spiritale" (*Purg.* 28:33), which ascends from the material to the spiritual, inspired by virtue.

30. There may be a connection between the spilling of Proserpina's flowers ("aut violas aut candida lilia," *Met.* 5:392) and the third Latin phrase with which the members of the pageant greet Beatrice's arrival in the Earthly Paradise: "Manibus, oh, date lilia plenis!" (*Purg.* 30:22). Beatrice's return would thus be associated, interestingly, not only with the early death of the youth Marcellus, to whom this verse is referred in *Aeneid* 6:883, but also somehow with Proserpina's loss of innocence and abduction to the lower world.

31. Cf. Ovid's assertion that in the grove from which Proserpina was abducted, "perpetuum ver est" (*Met.* 5:391). For a reading of Matelda as representing the mythological figure or, better, divinely created force of Spring, as dual embodiment of *ver* and *pascha*, see Mazzaro. For overviews of previous critical interpretations of Matelda's historical and symbolic identity, see Forti; Barnes; Armour.

32. For parallels between Beatrice's advent and the Song of Songs, see Priest; Pertile; Chiarenza.

33. Dante is also clearly drawing on the lyric convention of addressing one's poems to a hard, cruel lady; see, for instance, his own *ballatetta*, "Perché ti vedi giovinetta e bella" ("pres'hai orgoglio e durezza nel core") and *rime petrose*.

34. This triple pattern (presence > departure > return) is clearly a version of Freud's grandson's *fort-da* game, in which the infant stages and masters the traumatic experience of his mother's departure and return by throwing a wooden reel with a piece of string tied to it into a place where he can no longer see it and then recovering it again by pulling the string (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 8–11). Peter Brooks relates both this game, based on the repetition of an unpleasant experience, and the psychological compulsion to repeat in general, to the functioning of fictional plots.

35. See Jacoff, who writes: "Beatrice is thus *ab initio* considered in her maternal/mediatory roles as well as in terms of her courtly/erotic connotations. In the figure of the biblical Rachel Dante can remind us of both dimensions of Beatrice: as mother (Jeremiah 31) and as beloved (Genesis 29)" (8). Maternal imagery to describe Christ and God became popular in the twelfth century, especially with Cistercian monks. See, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs* 9:5–6, where he describes the Bridegroom's nurturing breasts; Bynum 110f.

36. "Usquequo parvuli diligitis infantiam et stulti ea quae sibi sunt noxia cupiant et imprudentes odibunt scientiam?"

37. On Dante's language here and, in particular, the comparisons between the tears of the penitent and ice melting (30:85–90 and 97–99), see especially Sturm-Maddox; Mazzoni.

38. God threatens Jerusalem for her idolatries: "Behold, I will gather together all thy lovers with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all whom thou hast loved, with all whom thou hast hated: and I will gather them together against thee on every side, and will discover thy shame in their sight, and they shall see all thy nakedness. . . . And I will deliver thee into their hands . . . and they shall strip thee of thy garments, and shall take away the vessels of thy beauty: and leave thee naked, and full of disgrace" (Ezekiel 16:37–39). See also Isaiah 3:16–24; Jeremiah 13:22–26.

39. As the phrase "l'antica fiamma" suggests, this is not the first time that Dante has trembled at the sight of Beatrice, for the powerful physical impact of the beloved on the lover is one of the thematic conventions of the *Stil novo*. See, for instance, the sonnet "Ciò che m'incontra, nella mente

more," in which he refers to "l'ebrietà del gran tremore" that strikes him when he draws near her (*Vita Nova* 8:4–5); also Cavalcanti's *canzone*, "Io non pensava che lo cor giammai": "Tant' è gentil che, quand' eo penso bene, / l'anima sento per lo cor tremare, / sì come quella che non pò durare / davanti al gran valor ch'è illei dimostro" (*Poeti* 2:500).

40. In the *Novellino*, among other more radical changes, the number of the go-betweens is doubled to four hundred, for the lady demands: "Diteli così, ch' io non li perdonerò già mai se non mi fa gridar merzé a cento baroni e a cento cavalieri e a cento donne e a cento donzelle, che tutti gridino a una boce merzè . . ." (Boutiere-Schutz 597). On the Italian *novella*, see Stone 71–81, who interprets the knight's crime as the betrayal of the generalized ego of troubadour lyric and lady's request that the courtly multitude ask for her pardon as a brilliant stratagem intended to reconstitute "the radically plural subjectivity of Provence" (78).

41. It is worth noting that the difference between her new and her old selves is more quantitative than qualitative, however, and that the old leads to the new; when Beatrice reappears to Dante, he feels the power of his "antico amor" and recognizes the signs of "l'antica fiamma" (30.39 and 48), finding himself caught up again in "l'antica rete" (32.6).

42. Cf. Prov. 8:23 ("ab aeterno ordita sum") and 8:27–30, cited by Dante in *Conv.* 3.14.7 and 3.15.16. The song "Amor che ne la mente" is also sung by Casella in *Purgatorio* 2 in a dramatic situation that implies a criticism and correction of its contents; see especially Freccero 186–94; Hollander, "*Purgatorio* II."

43. See the note on this passage from the *Convivio* in the Vasoli-De Robertis edition. Trovato (214–18) interprets the Donna Gentile's two features politically as representing in the context of the treatise *ratio* and *fides*, temporal and spiritual power, the Emperor and the Pope.

44. Also see the sonnet, "Negli occhi porta la mia donna Amore": "Quel ch'ella par quando un poco sorride, / non si può dicer né tenere a mente, / sì è novo miracolo e gentile" (*Vita Nova* 12.4).

45. Jacoff 10 n1. See Beatrice's explanation of figurative language in *Par.* 4: "Così parlar conveniensi al vostro ingegno, / però che solo da sensato apprende / ciò che fa poscia d'intelletto degno. / Per questo la Scrittura condescende / a vostra facoltà, e piedi e mano / attribuisce a Dio e altro intende" (40–45).

Dante's Stone Cold Rhymes

HEATHER WEBB

E io, che son costante più che pietra,
in ubidirti per bieltà di donna,
porto nascoso il colpo della pietra,
con la qual tu mi desti come a pietra
che t'avesse noiato lungo tempo,
tal che m'andò al core ov'io son pietra. (*Rime* 8:13–18)¹

The petrified heart is the poetic nucleus of the *rime petrose*, to borrow John Leyerle's term.² Leyerle describes a centripetal force around two nuclei in Chaucer's poems: the heart, representing love, and the chain, representing order. While we could track a similar motion in the *petrose* around the stony hearts of the poet and the lady, it is my objective in this essay to delve beneath Leyerle's supposition that the nucleus has a purely metaphoric status: "the heart represents love."³ It is my claim that, in Dante's poetry, the word *core* refers first and foremost to an organ. For the modern reader, it is difficult to imagine how the commonplace "hard-hearted" might have any literal connotations; for the late thirteenth-century scholar, on the other hand, a "hard-hearted" person might be assumed to suffer from physical and spiritual ailments. The physiological, the psychological and the spiritual were not, in fact, three separate domains but were instead understood as interrelated aspects of a single life-process. The heart at the core of this process was responsible for a multitude of tasks, such as maintaining the body's temperature, effecting emotional responses based on sensory perceptions and even receiving the Eucharist. Invoking the heart was a means of accessing a complex system that encompassed the whole range of human experience, from natural physiological function to an embodied encounter with the supernatural.

A study of the heart in the *rime petrose* provides, in my opinion, a unique insight into the ways in which Dante inscribed poetic creation into the life-process. The poems document a *physiospiritual* malfunction and relate a particular kind of poetry to that malfunction, thus foregrounding the intricate and delicate relationships between inspiration and salvation, poetic form and physical health. It is my hope that, by revealing the physiological, spiritual and poetic references contained within the nucleus of hard hearts and stony rhymes from the *petrose* to the *Inferno*, a vision of the complete *cardiopoetic* process will emerge.

I will begin by briefly tracing out the heart's role in the *Vita Nuova*, a work that I believe stands as a highly visible backdrop to the *rime petrose*. Francesco Bruni's essay in *Capitoli per una storia del cuore* points out that Provençal and Sicilian poets used "cor" and "mente" almost interchangeably to refer to a generalized interiority.⁴ The *Vita Nuova* is a meditated departure from the terminology of these poetic precedents, making use of natural philosophy to imagine a more detailed interior landscape. Late medieval scholars mapped the body according to Aristotelian principles, focusing on the movements of a rarefied blood-based spirit (understood variously as the soul itself or as an intermediary between body and soul) that was continually produced in the heart and pushed through the arteries to all extremities. This spirit took on different functions and was given different names according to location: the vital (or windy) spirit regulated the heartbeat and respiration, the natural spirit maintained digestion and the animal spirit controlled intellectual responses. The spirits also acted as intermediaries with the external world, carrying sensory perceptions into the body and bringing internal substances out into the world, in the forms of breath, tears, semen and voice. In the *Vita Nuova*, Dante makes use of these theories of spiritual circulation to describe the heart as the primary organ of sensory contact with the outside world:⁵

In quel puncto dico veracemente che lo spirito della vita, lo quale dimora ne la secretissima camera del cuore, cominciò a tremare sì fortemente che apparia nelli menomi polsi orribilmente; e tremando disse queste parole: "*Ecce Deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur michi!*" In quel puncto lo spirito animale, lo quale dimora nell'alta camera nella quale tutti li spiriti sensitivi portano le loro perceptioni, si cominciò a maravigliare molto, e parlando spetialmente alli spiriti del viso, disse queste parole: "*Apparuit iam beatitudo vestra!*"⁶

The heart is the first receptor of Beatrice's presence, relaying the perception to the animal spirit in the brain. As the roles of the "cor" and the

“mente” are individuated and the physiology of their relationship is established, a certain corporeality of the poet becomes central to Dante’s conception of the mechanism of poetry.

A second component of the poetic process is the presence of an inspirational other, frequently a “*donna angelicata*.” Dante describes inspiration as an infusion of Beatrice’s *spiriti* into his heart, by means of the eyes. He again relies on the structures of sensory and spirit function as elaborated in natural philosophical works:

Degli occhi suoi, come ch’ella li mova,
escono spirti d’amore inflammati,
che fèron gli occhi a qual che allor la guati,
e passan sì che ‘l cor ciascun ritrova . . .⁷

This sort of inspiration involves the presence of two bodies. The necessity for the presence of the inspiring other is well documented in Robert Harrison’s *Body of Beatrice*, although Harrison does not invoke the physiological argument.⁸

This understanding of the poetic process is developed systematically, then brought to a crisis after Beatrice’s death (in the absence of the inspiring effects of her corporeal presence) and is finally discovered again in a vision of transcendent inspiration:

Oltre la spera che più larga gira
passa ‘l sospiro ch’esce del mio core:
intelligenza nova, che l’Amore
piangendo mette in lui, pur sù lo tira.
Quand’elli è giunto là dove disira,
vede una donna che riceve onore,
e luce sì, che per lo suo splendore
lo peregrino spirito la mira.
Vedela tal, che quando ‘l mi ridice,
io no’llo ntendo, sì parla sottile
al cor dolente, che lo fa parlare.
So io che parla di quella gentile,
però che spesso ricorda Beatrice,
sì ch’io lo ‘ntendo ben, donne mie care.⁹

The solution indicated in this final sonnet both revitalizes the encounter model of poetic production and brings to it new salvational possibilities. The sigh that issues from Dante’s heart travels to the heavens, where its

contemplation of Beatrice endows it with new language. When it returns, Dante cannot understand its speech with his mind (“no lo intendo”), but the “spirito” can converse with his heart (“parla sottile al cor dolente che lo fa parlare”). The heart’s access to a divine Beatrice signals the possibilities both for personal salvation and for a poetry that speaks the language of grace.

It is against this background of promise, I believe, that we must read the alterity of the *rime petrose*. The *petrose* (two *canzoni*, one sestina and one double sestina) have traditionally been grouped together for their common themes—a wintry landscape and the poet’s obsessive desire for an inaccessible, “stony” woman.¹⁰ As a group and individually, they stage the impossibility of a divinely inspired poetry:

Levasi de la rena d’Etiopia
il vento peregrin che l’aere turba,
per la spera del sol ch’ora la scalda;
e passa ‘l mare, onde conduce copia
di nebbia tal che, s’altro non la sturba,
questo emisperio chiude e tutto salda;
e poi si solve, e cade in bianca falda
di fredda neve ed i’noiosa pioggia,
onde l’aere s’atrasta tutto e piagne:
e Amor, che sue ragne
ritira al ciel per lo vento che poggia,
non m’abbandona, sì è bella donna
questa crudel che m’è data per donna. (*Rime* 9:14–26)

Dark and ironic echoes of “Oltre la spera” are pervasive: “il vento peregrin” that lifts itself “per la spera del sol” is reminiscent of the “peregrino spirito” that passes “oltre la spera che più larga gira.” “Amor, che sue ragne ritira al ciel” is an enemy version of that god who draws the *spirito* upward: “l’Amore . . . pur su lo tira.” While the *spirito* of “Oltre la spera” returns to its source after its journey to heaven, bearing the presence of Beatrice, the pilgrim wind of “Io son venuto” becomes bogged down in snow and does not ever return. The dynamic cyclical motion in “Oltre la spera” is thus blocked, in the *petrose*, by a sudden cold. This is the staged impasse of these *canzoni*. The frozen landscape acts as a mirror to the poet’s heart and body: “la terra fa un suol che par di smalto, / e l’acqua morta si converte in vetro / per la freddura che di fuor la serra” (*Rime*

9:59–61). In this universe, all circulation has ceased; the fog is such that “questo emisperio chiude tutto e salda” (*Rime* 9:19).

In order to understand these images more completely, we must examine the physiology and the theology that Dante may be alluding to here. Alfred of Sareschal's treatise, “On the motion of the heart,” dating from about 1210, states that the heart is the source of heat and animation for the entire body and as such must remain in perpetual motion.¹¹ This is exactly what is lacking in the *petrose*: “così dinanzi al sembiante freddo / mi ghiaccia sopra il sangue d'ogne tempo” (*Rime* 8:31–32). According to Albert the Great, a philosopher of particular significance for Dante, poor circulation can cause problems not only for the health of the body, but also for that of the soul.¹² If the heart cannot heat the blood and move the *spiriti* throughout the body, cold creates fear. The theological implications of this bodily state can easily be inferred. Faith, Albert explains, is indicative of a warm heart, while fear and sadness—despair, in theological terms—indicates a cold heart: “Meditationes vero, quoniam quae declinant ad gaudium, sicut fiducia et bona spes, significant cordis fortitudinem et aequalitatem complexionis. . . . Quae autem declinant ad timorem et tristitiam, significant excessum in frigitate ipsius.”¹³ A cold heart is necessarily a hard heart, as “Amor, tu vedi ben” reveals: “Segnor, tu sai che per algente freddo / l'acqua diventa cristallina petra” (*Rime* 8:25–26). This process, in which materials are hardened and immobilized, occurs symmetrically in the frozen landscape and in the petrified body of the poet.

Biblical references to hardened hearts almost invariably invoke the problem of despair and a resulting lack of comprehension: “nolite obdurare corda vestra / sicut in inritatione / secundum diem temptationis in deserto / ubi temptaverunt me patres vestri.”¹⁴ The fathers' hearts are hardened out of fear for their lives, and a loss of faith in their divine mandate. In Mark's account, the apostles' despair after Christ's crucifixion impedes their belief in his resurrection: “exprobravit incredulitatem illorum et duritiam cordis quia his qui viderant eum resurrexisse non crediderant.”¹⁵ The cold, hard heart of the petrified poet is an unequivocal sign that the *petrose* are produced in a state of despair.

In his *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante describes the stanza as a womb or “gremium.”¹⁶ According to the poetic mechanism detailed in the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*, poetry is understood to be conceived through spiritual union with a divine being and to be brought forth (essentially, birthed) from the site of that union, the heart. The heart, the womb and

the stanza are thus presented as analogous creative spaces. In the *petrose*, then, the heart's frozen blockage to inspiration indicates a sort of infertility. The stanzas are filled with repetitive images of frozen water and frozen hearts—sets of images that may be a double reference, both to theories of heart dysfunction and to theories on the causes of infertility. In an unusual poetic maneuver, allusions to these metaphorically related physical ailments cast the *petrose* in a negative light. Albert postulates in his *De animalibus* that infertility may often be traced to a cold womb. Lack of heat in the womb leads to the retention of menstrual blood, essentially blocking the healthy cycle of fertility. The female reproductive organs, he suggests, are chilled by excessive sexual intercourse, as in the case of prostitutes, or may drop below the proper temperature if a woman imbibes large quantities of cold water. In men too, cold water was thought to cool and thus deactivate the sperm by remaining within the body without being adequately heated or sweated out.¹⁷ Infertile male and female bodies were imagined to be retaining something unhealthy, like the poet in the *petrose*: “non disgombra / un sol penser d'amore, ond'io son carco” (*Rime* 9:10–11).

“Io son venuto” elaborates a series of contrasts between the perpetual procreative motion of the heavens and the burdened poet who is immobilized at the *punto* where he has arrived: “Io son venuto al punto de la rota / che l'orizzonte, quando il sol si corca, / ci partorisce il geminato cielo” (*Rime* 9:1–3). The “trarre fuori” that in the *Commedia* is used to denote Dante's birthing of rhymes from the poetics of inspiration appears in the *petrose* as an action beyond the poet's realm of possibilities: “passato hanno lor termine le fronde / che trasse fuor la virtù d'Ariete / per adornare il mondo” (*Rime* 9:40–42) and, in an image later adopted by Petrarch, “la crudele spina / però Amor di cor non la mi tragge; / per ch'io son fermo di portarla sempre / ch'io sarò in vita, s'io vivesse sempre” (*Rime* 9: 49–52). The poet's body cannot bring forth the sort of poetry described in the *Commedia* because it is sealed, blocked by the retention of something we have yet to define.

Albert's theory that infertility may be caused by excessive intercourse also informs a crucial opposition in Dante's poetics, where melancholic, lustful sexuality is opposed to procreative sexuality. While the properly conceived poetry of the *Commedia* is frequently linked to reproduction, the sexuality of the *petrose* is continually exposed as infertile lust. The

anguish of impeded productive expulsion in the *petrose* is enhanced by dark fantasies of destructive erotic release:

Versan le vene le fummifere acque
per li vapor' che la terra ha nel ventre,
che d'abisso li tira suso in alto
onde cammino al bel giorno mi piacque
che ora è fatto rivo. (*Rime* 9:53–57)

This orgasmic moment is precisely what the poet cannot achieve, and it is striking how quickly this moment is re-contained, restrained and frozen over in the lines that follow; the “rivo” is, three lines later, replaced by “acqua morta [che] si converte in vetro” (*Rime* 9: 60). Durling and Martinez suggest that this poem is formed under the influence of Saturn, “quel pianeta che conforta il gelo” (*Rime* 9:7). Saturn, associated with melancholic sexuality, was also thought to be the slowest and coldest of all planets.¹⁸ It would seem, according to this characterization, to be the governing force behind the entire *petrose* cycle.

In the medieval period, melancholia was considered to be one of the inevitable results of obsessive love.¹⁹ Guglielmo da Saliceto, whose *Cyrurgia* closely follows Avicenna's theories, explains that love-sickness overcomes a man when he thinks obsessively about the beauty of a person, producing an abundance of the melancholic humor, which is cold and dry. The illness proceeds through depression, madness and physical debilitation.²⁰ The malady of the poet of the *petrose* is thus derived from disordered thought: “la mente mia, ch'è più dura che petra / in tener forte imagine di petra” (*Rime* 9:12–13). The normal cycle within the body, in which external perceptions are constantly relayed to the brain, has been blocked. The mind fixates on the contemplation of one particular image in an obsessive manner, rejecting any new input. As the melancholic humor is produced in response to this excessive thought, the brain only becomes colder and drier. It is, essentially, petrified.

The fantasy in “Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro” reveals the main problematic of the poet's fixation on the image:²¹

S'io avesse le belle trecce prese
che son fatte per me scudiscio e ferza,
pigliandole anzi terza
con esse passerei vespero e squille;

e non sarei pietoso né cortese,
anzi farei com'orso quando scherza;
e s'Amor me ne sferza,
io mi vendicherei di più di mille. (*Rime* 1:66–73)

The vindictive longing evoked here, to physically and forcibly take hold of the object of desire, is entirely circumscribed by the impossibility of such an action. The image, in its very inaccessibility, renders itself the object of eternally frustrated lust. In the *Roman de la rose*, Pygmalion laments the same problem: “une ymage sourde et mue / qui ne se crole ne se mue . . . ne ja de moi merci n'avra” (a deaf and dumb statue [image], / that neither changes nor moves . . . will never have mercy on [concede her favors to] me).²² As Agamben notes in *Stanze*, the Pygmalion of the *Roman* “compares himself to Narcissus in love with his own form,” while at the same time referencing the entire troubadour lyric tradition of *fol amor* in a situation where “merci” is out of the question.²³

Somewhat counter-intuitively, it is the tangible physical presence (and therefore the tangible otherness) of Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova* that encourages a re-direction of desire away from the self, towards the other and thus eventually towards God. In Beatrice's presence is the promise of *mercy*, the promise that the poet will eventually achieve the right sort of union with the divine. The retention of an image in the *petrose*, on the other hand, prevents the poet from opening himself to an inspiring other. While he has lost any faith in the possibility of grace, the poet does not accept his lyrics of petrified fixation as a truly viable poetic alternative. The *petrose* owe both form and content to an internal criticism that labels this sort of poetic production as infertile.

Let us now turn to the formal manifestations of this internal criticism. The intricate verse forms of the *rime petrose* are described as the direct consequence of the poet's frozen state:

Canzone, io porto ne la mente donna
tal che, con tutto ch'ella mi sia petra,
mi dà baldanza, ond'ogni uom mi par freddo:
sì ch'io ardisco a far per questo freddo
la novità che per tua forma luce,
che non fu mai pensata in alcun tempo. (*Rime* 8:61–66)

The *donna* in this scenario lacks all of Beatrice's spiritual power. She is, instead, an image in the poet's mind, allowing the poet to exclude the

role of the inspiring other from the process of poetic creation. This *donna* eventually loses any sense of distinction from the poet's own imaginary and becomes, rather, a talisman of poetic prowess. This fixed primary image is held to be worthy of endless reflection and elaborate formal attentions. The *canzone*, "Amor tu vedi ben," to which the *commiato* above belongs, is literally a doubling of the sestina, "Al poco giorno," that precedes it. The *novità* here is no more than an elaboration of an initially copied form, as the form of the sestina is a replication of Arnaut Daniel's design.²⁴ Blocking inspiration with fixation, the poet's icy burden leads him to embellish and harden the frame and the structure of his lyrics, while the content remains static. The form of the double sestina exasperates a restricted set of rhyme-words in a game of endless reflection, as the stanzas mirror the infertile body, loaded with material that cannot be expelled.

Dante claims, in the *commiato* cited above, that the stony lady inhabits his mind, kindling his desire to create forms that were never "thought" before. While in the *Vita Nuova* he suggested that his most worthy poetry would be the product of direct inspiration received within the heart, these lyrics exhibit a more cerebral mode of production. Interestingly, this cerebral poetry is explicitly identified with imitation and competition in the poet's drive to demonstrate formal mastery.

Arnaut Daniel's *vida* recounts a poetry competition in the court of Richard Lionheart and provides possible insights into the implications of Dante's choice of rival in the *petrose*, a choice that speaks volumes as to Dante's view of his own poetics at this point:

E fon aventura qu'el fon en la cort del rey Richart d'Englaterra, et estant en la cort, us autres joglars escomes lo com el trobava en pus caras rimas que el. Arnautz tenc so ad esquern, e feron messios cascun[s] de son palafre, que sera en poder del rey. E l rey[s] enclaus cascu en una cambra. E'n Arnautz de fasti que n'ac non ac poder que lasses un mot ab autre. Lo joglar[s] fes son cantar leu e tost; et els non avian mas .x. jorns d'aspazi, e devia s jutgar per lo rey a cap de .v. jorns. Lo joglar[s] demandet a'n Arnaut si avia fag, e'n Arnautz respos que oc, passat a .iii. jorns; e no'n avia pessat. E l joglar [s] cantava tota nueg sa canso, per so que be la saubes. E'n Ar. pessel co l traysses isquern; tan que venc una nueg e l joglars la cantava, e'n Ar. la va tota arretener e l so. E can foro denan lo rey, n'Arnautz dis que volia retraire sa chanso, e comenset mot be la chanso que l joglars avia facha. . . . E'n Arnautz comtet li tot com era estat; e l reys ac ne gran gaug e tenc so tot a gran esquern . . . e fo donatz lo cantars a 'n Arnaut Daniel, que ditz: "Anc yeu non l'ac, mas ela m'a."²⁵

(And it happened that he was at the court of King Richard of England and while he was at the court, another *jongleur* said that he composed in richer rhymes than Arnaut. Arnaut took this for a joke, and so they decided that they would leave the matter to the judgment of the king. And the king closed each of them in a room. Arnaut, because of the *ennui* he felt, did not manage to link one word to another. The *jongleur* composed his song easily and quickly. They only had ten days' time and had to be judged by the king in five days. The *jongleur* asked Arnaut if he had already done his, and Arnaut responded that he had, three days ago, and that he hadn't thought any more about it. The *jongleur* sang his song all night, so that he would know it well. Arnaut thought that he would play a trick on him, so that when night came and the *jongleur* sang his song, Arnaut memorized it all, and the melody. When they were before the king, Arnaut said he wanted to sing his song, and began the song the *jongleur* had composed. . . . [When] Arnaut recounted how this had happened, the king was much amused and thought it was a great joke. And the song was given to Arnaut Daniel, and it goes: "I never had it, but it has me.")²⁶

Arnaut resolves his case of writer's block through memorizing and performing—physically taking possession of—the *canço* of his fellow *jongleur*. Dante, too, takes possession of Arnaut's formal innovations. But he emphasizes the ways in which this imitation reinforces his own blockage. The dominant images of these reflective poems thus become the images of writer's block—burdened, infertile bodies. In Arnaut's *vida*, imitation is interpreted as retention: "la va tota *arretener* e.l so." While, for Arnaut, the successful retention and appropriation of his competitor's *canço* ends in the release of laughter in the public sphere, Dante's poetics of appropriation envisions an isolated, alienated blockage from which there is no release. On yet another level, Arnaut's poetry in general, as Peter Bondanella observes, "celebrates the nearly achieved *surplus* or sings of the certainty of its bestowal . . . though his wait is long, his desire is constant and the reward is certain."²⁷ The promise of erotic release is palpable in Arnaut's lyrics, whereas Dante's *rime* crush any hint of a future consummation of his frozen desire. In the *petrose*, there is essentially no future. The temporal horizon, while omnipresent in the astrological references that frame the poet's suffering, is completely extinguished in the poet's immobilized desire. The distinct and delimiting temporality of the court scene in Arnaut's *vida* allows for resolution in competition with a present rival. Dante's internalized rival, namely Arnaut, is instead eternally absent, and at the same time eternally powerful, as these lyrics suggest a composition in isolation, perhaps in exile.²⁸

Playful suspense in Arnaut's public poetry becomes idolatrous stasis in Dante's silent imitation. Ezra Pound points out that Arnaut's famous "L'aura amara" requires the ear to "carry" seventeen rhymes at once.²⁹ Just as he does in his famous sestina about the nail and the uncle, Arnaut plays with the listener's ability to maintain and expect—even for the space of seventeen lines—the same sound within the ear. But while Arnaut depends heavily on the effect of repetition, he does not allow it to limit his range of signification. Arnaut's sestina, for instance, allows for variation of meaning as long as the sound remains the same. It is interesting to note that this is the form of the sestina that Petrarch later chooses to emulate, while only Dante insists on maintaining the same meaning for each of the rhyme words in his sestinas, ensuring a complete petrification of content.³⁰ Dante thus eliminates Arnaut's trademark sense of play, and forbids any release from his deadly serious exercise in competition.

In this solitary contest, Arnaut's imitation and jest are transformed into both the practice and critique of destructive appropriation and retention. The *commiato* of the final poem of the *petrose* describes the *canzone* as a weapon, created for the purposes of vendetta:

Canzon, vattene ritto a quella donna
che m'ha rubato e morto, e che m'involà
quello ond'i' ho più gola,
e d'alle per lo cor d'una saetta:
ché bello onor s'acquista in far vendetta. (*Rime* 1:79–83)

The vengeance that is threatened here collapses the wounds of love into the wounds of poetry. While Arnaut describes his tools of the trade with all the confidence of a master craftsman: "Fauc motz e capuig e doli, / E serant verai e cert / Quan n'aurai passat la lima"³¹ (I make words that I plane and finish; / and every word will be exact and certain / once I have passed the file there),³² in Dante's *petrose* these tools have become self-destructive weapons: "Ahi angosciosa e dispietata lima / che sordamente al mia vita scemi, / perché non ti ritemi / sì di rodermi il cuore a scorza a scorza?" (*Rime* 1:22–25).

Arnaut vaunts his ability to create and to refine a product that is imagined as exterior to the self. His physical manipulation of that product, he claims, renders it exact and certain. Of course, for Arnaut, exactitude still entails a large degree of variance and ambiguity in meaning. The uncontrollable actions of the "lima" in Dante's *petrose*, however, reveal an

entirely different attitude towards the production of poetry. As we have seen in his stabilization of meaning in the sestina, Dante's desire for exactitude imposes great restrictions on his lyrics. When Dante proclaims that: "Così nel mio parlar vogli'esser aspro, / com'è negli atti questa bella pietra" (*Rime* 1:1–2), he establishes the terms of his poetry of reflection; he wishes to fix in words the intangible image within his own mind. Since that image does not vary, its lyric reflection must communicate that immutability. Furthermore, the lyric is not conceived of as an external product that is refined by the craftsman's work upon it. The lyric is instead integrally connected to the poet's body. Dante's account of the "lima" betrays his anxiety that his obsessive, even idolatrous fixation on the petrifying image has in fact become a malady beyond his control. His excessive exercise in craftsmanship essentially translates to a violence upon the self. Endless formal refinement in the articulation of an internal image is envisioned as destroying the heart's natural function in the poetic process, blocking the possibility for new inspiration.

We must turn to the *Commedia* to discover the cure for this terminal blockage in the cardiopoetic process. In Canto 1, we find the pilgrim alone in a dark wood, bearing the same sign of spiritual trouble as the poet of the *petrose*, "paura . . . nel lago del cor" (*Inf.* 1:19–21). Beatrice explains the pilgrim's danger to Virgil in terms that conjure up those dark *rime*: "l'amico mio, e non de la ventura, / ne la deserta spiaggia è impedito / sì nel cammin, che volt' è per paura" (*Inf.* 2:61–63; emphasis added). Of course, the impediment is presented thematically in the *Commedia*; it is never embodied on the formal level. Even in the darkest moments of *Inferno*, the poetry moves continually forward, through the motor of *terza rima*. *Terza rima* is a model of healthy circulation, infinitely open to gathering in new sounds and new material from outside itself. It is the formal opposite of the stasis exemplified in the sestina.

Much has been written about the threat of petrification in the Medusa episode of *Inferno* and its connections to the *rime petrose*. John Freccero shows that the *petrose* are textually recalled in the ninth canto of *Inferno*, and suggests that this moment represents a risk of blockage due to the threat of idolatry.³³ Giuseppe Mazzotta adds that "Così nel mio parlar voglio essere aspro" depicts a specifically Medusan image of what he terms the poet's madness:

Non truovo schermo ch'ella non mi spezzi
né luogo che dal suo viso m'asconda;

ché, come fior di fronda,
così de la mia mente tien la cima. (*Rime* 1:14–17)

This image of the poet as defenseless Perseus is made more complex by the fact that the Medusa is within, firmly implanted in the lover's mind.³⁴ According to Mazzotta, the call in *Inferno* to "intelletti sani" brings to light the issue that fascination with the *donna petrosa* or the Medusa is an insane love suggesting the sin of heresy, a failure of understanding.³⁵ Not only is this fascination an insane love, it is an unhealthy one. The "intelletto sano" capable of proper interpretation must be connected to the natural circulation within the body, to that flow of *spiriti* responsible for warmth, health and, as we have seen above, belief and understanding.

Ironically, it seems that critics have themselves been mesmerized by Medusa's textual presence, so much so that this episode has been regarded as the single critical petrification threat in *Inferno*. I would argue that nothing is resolved or overcome in *Inferno* 9. On the contrary, the problem of the *petrose* returns to haunt the pilgrim insistently as he journeys through Cocytus. The resurgence of those *rime* is signaled immediately as he descends into the ninth circle:

S'io avessi le rime aspre e chiocce
come si converrebbe al tristo buco
sovra 'l qual pontan tutte l'altre rocce,
io premerei di mio concetto il suco
più pienamente; ma perch'io non l'abbo,
non senza tema a dicer mi conduco:
ché non è impresa da pigliare a gabbo
discriver fondo a tutto l'universo,
né da lingua che chiami mamma o babbo.
Ma quelle donne aiutino il mio verso
ch'aiutaro Anfione a chiuder Tebe
sì che dal fatto il dir non sia diverso. (*Inf.* 32:1–12)

This passage recalls the lines: "così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro / com'è ne li atti questa bella petra." And it is, in fact, in the realms of Antenora and Ptolomea that we witness the most profound revelation of the petrified condition that all the damned souls share with the poet of the *petrose*. Couched in the safety of a form that is leading us to better places, the wintry landscape returns: "un lago che per gelo / avea di vetro e non d'acqua sembiante. / Non fece al corso suo sì grosso velo / di verno

la Danoia in Osterlicchi” (*Inf.* 32:23–26). The frozen bodies of water illustrate the threat that the pilgrim must eventually overcome. But, in *Inferno*, the pilgrim is deeply engaged in the sins that surround him:

Allor lo presi per la cuticagna . . .

Io avea già i capelli in mano avvolti,
e tratti glien’ avea più d’una ciocca,
latrando lui con li occhi in giù raccolti. (32:97, 103–105; emphasis added)

The pilgrim’s actions here recall the fantasy in the *petrose* in which he violently grabs the hair of the *donna*, asking “perché non latra per me, com’io per lei?” His enactment of the fantasy here collapses the roles of the attacker and the attacked, revealing to what degree the violence in the *Inferno* is figured as a vendetta against the self. The attacked sinner is the one who barks out in pain, while in the *petrose* it is the erstwhile attacker who barks after the lady. The sinner’s eyes gaze downwards, “in giù raccolti,” the very portrait of the poet of the *petrose*: gazing inwards, fixated on an unchanging, self-same image. The pilgrim is thus figured both as the sinner trapped in the ice and as that body grasping the hair of the trapped one. In the verses “nel mondo suso ancora io te ne cangi, / se quella con ch’io parlo non si secca” (*Inf.* 32:138–139), the pilgrim indicates his awareness of his double status in Cocytus. The tears of the traitors freeze within their eyes, which is analogous to a drying of the material of speech. Both speech and tears issue from the heart, and the heart in this realm is frozen solid.

In the character of Ugolino we come face to face with the true nature of this physiospiritual malfunction:

“Tu vuo’ ch’io rinovelli
disperato dolor che ‘l cor mi preme
già pur pensando, pria ch’io ne favelli.
Ma se le mie parole esser dien seme
che frutti infamia al traditor ch’i’ rodo,
parlare e lagrimar vedrai insieme.” (*Inf.* 33:4–9; emphasis added)

The pain Ugolino feels in his heart is partly that of the cold, which was thought to exert pressure. Clearly, his speech will do nothing to relieve that pressure. I believe that Dante allows for only two poetic possibilities,

either productive generation, or melancholic consumption. While Ugolino alludes to the possible fertility of speech production: “se le mie parole esser dien seme / che frutti infamia al traditor ch’i’ rodo,” he immediately betrays himself with the words “ch’i’ rodo.” Just as the poet’s file in the *petrose* gnaws away at the poet’s own heart, Ugolino is effectively gnawing away at himself:

Ahi angosciosa e dispietata lima
che sordamente la mia vita scemi,
perché non ti ritemi
sì di *rodermi* il cuore a scorza a scorza? (*Rime* 1:22–25; emphasis added)

Ugolino’s own story reveals that his frozen heart is incapable of production. When he hears the tower door being nailed shut, as he retells it: “io non piangea, sì dentro *impetrai*: / piangevan elli; e Anselmuccio mio / disse: ‘Tu guardi sì, padre! Che hai?’ / perciò non lagrimai, ne rispuos’io” (*Inf.* 33:49–52; emphasis added). Ugolino’s petrification is a revelation of the real threat of despair. As the door is nailed shut, he turns to stone within and his heart halts the processes of extromission. No speech, no tears come forth from his body, indicating that all connection with the external world has been lost. His actions are instead turned against himself: “ambo le man per lo dolor mi morsi” (*Inf.* 33:58) as he is, from the moment of his petrification, utterly alone. He is therefore unable to receive the offers of salvation that come to him: “‘Padre, assai ci fia men doglia / se tu mangi di noi: tu ne vestisti / queste misere carni, e tu le spoglia’” (*Inf.* 33:61–3). These words contain within them all the promise of transcendence, of a spiritual release from the enclosing body, figured triply as the tower, the earth (“ahi dura terra, perché non t’apristi?”; *Inf.* 33:66) and Ugolino’s own hardened heart.

Ugolino’s ironic language reinforces his identity with the pilgrim:

“Ben se’ crudel, se tu già non ti duoli
pensando ciò che ‘l mio cor s’annunziava;
e se tu non piangi, di che pianger suoli?” (*Inf.* 33:40–42)

The line “‘l mio cor s’annunziava” must be read as a reference to the Annunciation.³⁶ The Virgin can be considered emblematic of perfect receptivity to the divine. She is entirely, humbly, a vessel for the incarnation of the deity. Ugolino’s heart is figured as the infernal counterpart to

Mary's womb, announcing a sentence of death *to itself* ("s'annunziava"). As unreceptive as a stone to the otherness of divinity, Ugolino is unable to comprehend or to accept the possibility of salvation. Remarking on the pilgrim's lack of tears, he calls attention to the fact that both he and his interlocutor show all the signs of a deadly imprisonment.

Fra Alberigo's reference to his heart is another perverse reference to the Virgin's womb:

"... O anime crudeli
tanto che data v'è l'ultima posta
levatemi dal viso i duri veli,
sì ch'io sfoghi 'l duol che 'l cor m'impregna
un poco, pria che 'l pianto si raggeli." (*Inf.* 33:110–114; emphasis added)

Again, as in Ugolino's case, the language of reproduction is laden with irony. Alberigo had his relatives killed, as we know, using the signal: "vengan le frutta." The "impregnation" of the heart here, just like the "annunciation" in Ugolino's case, is a reflexive action. Here in the ice of Cocytus, we find the metaphors of the Incarnation employed to expose the sterile womb of the despairing, alienated heart.

In *Inferno* we thus find a revelation of the spiritual state of the *petrose*. Once the pilgrim recognizes these dangers, he is able to embark upon his apprenticeship in the process of producing a different sort of poetry. His training involves a new conception of a poet's relationship to his masters or predecessors. The problems of poetic competition exposed in the *petrose* and in *Inferno* are gradually neutralized through gender alterations in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*.³⁷ As Jeffrey Schnapp has shown, the Virgin's generosity becomes central as a model for relations between poets while poetic genealogies are redrawn along *matrilinear* lines.³⁸ It seems that Dante is painstakingly transforming his ideal portrait of the poet here, from the earlier image of a craftsman with weapon-like tools to the memorable image we find in *Paradiso* of a mother bird sitting on her nest and waiting for the light.

In Canto 30 of *Purgatorio*, we witness the cure for the ailment of the *petrose*: the ice that seals the pilgrim's heart melts away, opening a path for a subsequent inspiration:³⁹

Sì come neve tra le vive travi
per lo dosso d'Italia si congela,

soffiata e stretta da li venti schiavi,
poi, liquefatta, in sé stessa trapela,
pur che la terra che perde ombra spiri,
sì che par foco fonder la candela;
così fui senza lagrime e sospiri
anzi 'l cantar di quei che notan sempre
dietro a le note de li eterni giri;
ma poi che 'ntesi ne le dolci tempre
lor compatire a me, par che se detto
avesser: 'Donna, perché sì lo stempre?',
lo gel che m'era intorno al cor ristretto,
spirito e acqua fessi, e con angoscia
de la bocca e de li occhi uscì del petto. (*Purg.* 30:85–99)

The ice that has been restraining the pilgrim's heart is melted into "spirito e acqua." In a reversal of the immutable fixation of the poet of the *petrose* and the sinners in Cocytus, the pilgrim is unburdened as his *spiriti* are again set in motion. As the body is opened adequately to exude words and tears, it nears a state of receptivity that will allow for the possibility of a divinely inspired poetics.

The actual inspiration the pilgrim has been preparing for does not occur until the final canto of the *Commedia*:

Qual è colui che sognando vede,
che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa
rimane, e l'altro a la mente non riede,
cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa
mia visione, e ancor mi distilla
nel core il dolce che nacque da essa.
Così la neve al sol si disigilla;
così al vento ne le foglie levi
si perdea la sentenza di Sibilla. (*Par.* 33:58–66)

Mazzotta points out that the product of this vision at the end of *Paradiso* ("ancor mi distilla nel core il dolce che nacque da essa") shows the heart to be a receptacle of some kind. These verses recall and repair the "paura . . . nel lago del cor" of *Inferno* I.⁴⁰ Here, neither "mente" nor "memoria" nor any entity formed by merging the two is left functioning.⁴¹ The experience is both likened to and contrasted with that of one waking from a dream. While the dreamer can bring nothing to mind, the passion of the dream has been imprinted upon him. As Dante's truth claims for the

poem stress that this was *not* merely a dream, it would seem that the pilgrim has lost his vision but is left with something quite different from that which the dreamer finds, something that is *distilled within* his heart. A dream may leave an imprint, an external mark, but this vision leaves something within that will one day be brought forth from the heart, written in the language that only it can produce. The images that describe memory loss indicate an opening to the divine infusion: “così la neve al sol si disigilla.” The heart is softened and unsealed as it warms to resemble the heat of the Virgin’s womb: “nel ventre tuo si raccese l’amore / per lo cui caldo nell’eterna pace / così’ è germinato questo fiore” (*Par.* 33:7–9).⁴² The epic that is germinated at the culmination of this physiospiritual healing is thus figured as the product of a sacred source and a human matrix. It is, in Dante’s words, a *poema sacro*, “al quale ha posto mano terra e cielo” (*Par.* 25:1–2).⁴³

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NOTES

1. I would like to thank Robert Harrison, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Rachel Jacoff for the comments, conversations and suggestions that helped shape this essay. All quotations from the *Rime* are taken from *Dante Alighieri: Rime*, edited by Domenico De Robertis (Firenze: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 2002). Quotations from the *Commedia* are taken from *La “Commedia” secondo l’antica vulgata*, edited by Giorgio Petrocchi, 7 vols. (Firenze: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1994).

2. John Leyerle, “The Heart and the Chain,” in *Chaucer’s Troilus: Essays in Criticism*, edited by Stephen A. Barney (Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoe String Press, 1980), 181–210.

3. Leyerle, 181.

4. Francesco Bruni, “Le costellazioni del cuore nell’antica lirica italiana,” in *Capitoli per una storia del cuore: Saggi sulla lirica romanza*, edited by Francesco Bruni (Palermo: Sellerio, 1988), 95.

5. Throughout this essay I employ the adjective “spiritual” to refer to *spiriti*; in this case a “spiritual circulation” is a circulation of *spiriti*.

6. *Vita Nova*, edited by Guglielmo Gorni (Torino: Einaudi, 1996), 1:5–6.

7. *Vita Nova* 10:23.

8. Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Body of Beatrice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

9. *Vita Nova* 30:10–13.

10. Gianfranco Contini calls for an end to the debate over the identity of the “donna Pietra,” stating that she is simply the link between Dante’s most technical poems. *Rime*, edited by Gianfranco Contini (Torino: Einaudi, 1946) 148. While Franco Ferrucci’s recent article, “Plenilunio sulla selva: il *Convivio*, le petrose, la *Commedia*,” *Dante Studies* 119 (2001): 67–103, suggests that more than four of Dante’s poems ought to be considered *petrose*, I will employ the term *petrose* as the bulk of Dante criticism has, in reference to: “Io son venuto al punto della rota,” “Al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d’ombra,” “Amor tu vedi ben che questa donna,” and “Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro.” Other studies that have influenced this essay are: Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, *Time*

and the Crystal: Studies in Dante's Rime petrose (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1990); John Freccero, "Medusa: The Letter and the Spirit," in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, edited by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 119–36; Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 285–86.

11. As cited in Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 183.

12. Bruno Nardi has established the significance of Albert the Great for Dante in *Saggi di filosofia dantesca*, 2nd edn (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1967).

13. Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus* (Munster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1916), lib. I, tract. 3 cap. 4.

14. Psalm 94, 8, quoted from *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994).

15. *Biblia*, Mc 16, 14.

16. Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, edited and translated by Steven Botterill (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), II. ix. 2.

17. Albertus Magnus, lib. X, tract. 1—tract. 2 cap. 1.

18. Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, 82. Ferrucci suggests that this "pianeta" is the moon, rather than Saturn. In either case, it seems safe to associate the "pianeta che conforta il gelo" with a melancholic state.

19. Massimo Ciavolella's *La "malattia d'amore" dall'antichità al medioevo* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1976) offers an in-depth study of medieval conceptions of the illness that I believe is at work in the *petrose*.

20. Ciavolella, 66–67.

21. For a discussion of whether or not this fantasy is to be read as a rape, see Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal*, and Robert M. Durling, "The Audience(s) of the *De vulgari eloquentia* and the *Petrose*," *Dante Studies* 110 (1992): 25–37. Durling and Martinez see this fantasy as a desire for reciprocity, as "this is officially not a rape, since the lady's desire is now imagined as matching his own" (26). I would argue that, as these poems stage an absence of the other, any attempt to take into account the lady's desires is essentially futile. I think the lines themselves leave no question that a violent and vindictive act is being imagined here.

22. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, *Le Roman de la rose*, edited by F. Lecoy (Paris, 1970–73), vv. 20821–20822. Translation in Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas* (Torino: Einaudi Paperbacks, 1993), 64.

23. Agamben, 63–64.

24. The debt that Dante's lyrics owe Arnaut Daniel is discussed in Peter E. Bondanella's "Arnaut Daniel and Dante's 'Rime Petrose,'" in *Studies in Philology*, 68 (1971): 416–435. Bondanella points out that perhaps critics have assumed too much in that relationship, and that there are important thematic and stylistic differences between Dante and Daniel's lyrics. I am concerned with the formal level of imitation, particularly in the sestina and the double sestina, that Dante acknowledges in his *De vulgari eloquentia*.

25. *Les Poésies d'Arnaut Daniel*, edited and translated by René Lavaud (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1973), 119–121.

26. The translation is my own.

27. Bondanella, 423.

28. Ferrucci casts doubt upon the traditional dating that puts the composition of the *petrose* at 1296–7. He suggests that the *petrose* were composed in 1307 and 1308.

29. Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (London: J.M. Dent, 1952), 23n.

30. See *La vita e le opere del trovatore Arnaldo Daniello*, ed. U. A. Canello (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1883), 53.

31. *Les Poésies d'Arnaut Daniel*, X: 2–4.

32. The translation is my own.

33. Freccero, "Medusa: The Letter and the Spirit."

34. Mazzotta, 286.

35. Mazzotta, 279.

36. Durling and Martinez note that “annunziava” gains particular weight here due to the importance of the Annunciation; see *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, I: “Inferno”* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 527, n.41.

37. See Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “Virgilio madre e Beatrice ammiraglio: generi grammaticali e letterari nella *Commedia*,” in *Studi americani su Dante*, edited by Gian Carlo Alessio and Robert Hollander (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1989), 221–243.

38. Schnapp, 237.

39. For a study of the recurrence of the language of the *petrose* in *Purgatorio* 30, interpreted as a re-evaluation of earthly love, see Sara Sturm-Maddox, “The *Rime Petrose* and the Purgatorial Palinode,” in *Studies in Philology*, 84 (1987): 119–133.

40. Mazzotta, 264–266.

41. Rita Librandi’s article “Dal cuore all’anima nella lirica di Dante e Petrarca,” in *Capitoli per una storia del cuore*, points out that *mente* and *memoria* become synonymous in the *Vita Nuova* (127).

42. For comments on the prominence of womb imagery in *Paradiso* 33, see Rebecca West’s *lectura* in *Lectura Dantis Virginiana*, III. *Dante’s Paradiso: Introductory readings*, edited by Tibor Wlassics (Supplement to *Lectura Dantis*, 1995), especially 16–17.

43. There is an interesting connection to be made here with Petrarch’s poetry, in which the desire for a mystical encounter is continually thwarted as the lyric becomes the space in which that frustration is documented. Exhibiting the same self-conscious awareness of spiritual failure that we witness in the *petrose*, Petrarch’s poetry elaborates the blockage of isolated obsession. In the *Canzoniere*, poetry and mysticism are definitively separated as poetry is found to be reflective of the mind, of what is specifically human and flawed. Dante’s *rime petrose*, through Petrarch, create a lasting legacy of melancholic lyrics that dramatize their divorce from faith, a legacy defined by its distance from the alternative offered in the *Commedia*. Ironically, a poetics of infertility engenders perhaps the greatest and most enduring poetic tradition of all, Petrarchism. For perspectives on the relationship between Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* and the *petrose*, see Claudio G. Antoni, “Esperienze stilistiche petrose da Dante al Petrarca,” in *Modern Language Studies*, 13 (1983): 21–33, who speaks of a “petrosità puramente di contenuto” in Petrarch, and the introduction to *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems: The “Rime sparse” and Other Lyrics*, edited and translated by Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 1–35.

American Dante Bibliography for 2002

STEVEN BOTTERILL

This bibliography is intended to include all publications on Dante (books, articles, translations, reviews) appearing in North America in 2002, as well as reviews from foreign sources of books published in the United States and Canada. The listing of reviews is necessarily selective, especially in the case of studies bearing only peripherally upon Dante. Items not recorded in the bibliographies for previous years are entered as addenda to the current list; items from 2002 not identified in time for inclusion in the list will be added in future issues of the journal. I extend my thanks to my research assistant, Ryan Maddox, for his invaluable help.

Books

Alighieri, Pietro. *Comentum super poema Comedie Dantis: A Critical Edition of the Third and Final Draft of Pietro Alighieri's "Commentary on Dante's 'Divine Comedy'"*. Edited by Massimiliano Chiamenti. Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002.

Chiamenti's monumental effort at last makes it possible for twenty-first-century readers to use, and profit from, a reliable text of the third version of Dante's son's commentary on his father's poem. Exemplary in its scrupulous and exhaustive attention to the text and its impeccable observation of the norms of philology, this is an indispensable resource for readers interested in the fourteenth-century tradition of commentary on the *Commedia*.

Fortin, Ernest L. *Dissent and Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002.

Fortin takes a decidedly historiographical and politicized approach to Dante's work, one which attempts to extract a specifically historical meaning from the texts while conceding that this is an inherently difficult enterprise because of Dante's refusal to limit his own approach in this way. He extends his argument by considering Arabic and Hebrew texts of Dante's era; because of the essentially humanistic outlook of Dante's work, it is very dissimilar from these, but still linked to them by ties of a historical nature.

Fraser, Jennifer Margaret. *Rites of Passage in the Narratives of Dante and Joyce*. Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2002.

Fraser constructs her comparison of Dante and Joyce by introducing the image of a medieval diptych, with its two separate, but related, panels. Authors are obviously separated by features such as chronology, but their works can be brought into fruitful relationship through close examination. By subjecting Dante's text to such examination, Fraser seeks to prove that Joyce's narratives take on a new, changed meaning. Fraser goes on to inquire if it is Dante who influences Joyce, or if it is the reader who is changed after the experience of reading each author's work. She concludes that, at the very least, familiarity with Joyce's work may change the reader's outlook on the *Commedia*.

Hein, Rolland. *Christian Mythmakers: C.S. Lewis, Madeleine L'Engle, J.R.R. Tolkien, George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton, Charles Williams, Dante Alighieri, John Bunyan, Walter Wangerin, Robert Siegel, and Hannah Humard*. Chicago, Illinois: Cornerstone Press Chicago, 2002.

Dante makes a perhaps rather unexpected appearance in this collection of mostly twentieth-century authors of "Christian myth," but Hein makes a plausible case for his relevance in this context, especially since many of the writers appearing here (Lewis, Williams, Tolkien, for starters) acknowledged his importance to their own work. By and large he avoids the obvious dangers of anachronism as he conducts an analysis that will perhaps appeal above all to declaredly Christian students of literature, but whose usefulness and implications—like Dante's own work—in the end reach far beyond any narrowly confessional definition.

Parks, Tim. *Hell and Back: Reflections on Writers and Writing from Dante to Rushdie*. New York: Arcade Pub, 2002.

In the part of this collection of reprinted writings that deals with Dante, Parks, a distinguished British novelist and commentator on Italian society, literature, and culture, analyzes the allegorical significance present in *Inferno*, and poses the question—familiar to perhaps more readers of the *Comedy* than Dante scholars would care to admit—of how anything in Purgatory and Paradise can possibly compete with what Dante presents to his readers while conveying them through Hell. Particularly interesting is Parks' description of the poem as a means both of making Dante famous, and of allowing him to renew the relationship with Beatrice that was interrupted by her untimely death.

Schildgen, Brenda Deen. *Dante and the Orient*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

Schildgen presents the argument that Dante created the *Comedy* as a work about Europe, not simply because of inherent "Eurocentrism," but because of the political and ecclesiastical turmoil in Italy. The "matter of the East" is transformed into a localized Crusade to save Florence, Italy, Europe, and the Christian church. She discusses the state of geographical knowledge in the thirteenth century; how Crusade literature may be compared to Dante's "crusader epic;" how Dante uses the Crusader narrative in order to save Europe; Dante's introduction of the Indus and how it is able to represent the areas outside the his "Orosian geopolitical world;" and finally, how Dante makes all physical and geographical realities a metaphorical instance through his representation of a miraculous vision, because its ontological status surpasses that of all the travels recounted by medieval authors.

Articles

Albrecht, James. "'Il cenno ch'a ciò si conface' (*Purg.* 21. 15).'" *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*: posted February 25, 2002, at www.dantesociety.org > Publications > Electronic Journal (EBDSA).

Rejecting the explanations offered by earlier commentators, Albrecht proposes that the "cenno" in this line is the sign of the cross, but that the real significance of the episode lies in what does not precede that sign, namely the verbal response "and eternal life" invited by Statius' salutation (as the familiar formulation in the Liturgy of the Hours would suggest). Virgil is debarred by his damnation from invoking in speech an eternal

life of salvation in which he does not share, but he is still capable of making an appropriate, indeed exemplary, physical gesture of response.

Alfie, Fabian. "Rustico's Reputation: Ramifications for Dante's *Tenzone* with Forese Donati." *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*: posted March 29, 2002, at www.dantesociety.org > Publications > Electronic Journal (EBDSA).

Argues that the fluctuating status of Rustico's reputation after it reached a peak in the 1280s and 1290s makes it relatively less likely that a much later author (such as Stefano Finiguerra, "il Za") wrote the *tenzone* ascribed to Dante and Forese Donati than that Dante and Forese themselves did.

Allaire, Gloria. "*Filigrane divine*: Watermarks as Images in Dante's *Paradiso*." *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*: posted September 19, 2002, at www.dantesociety.org > Publications > Electronic Journal (EBDSA).

Noting the use on several occasions in the *Comedy* of imagery derived from manuscript production, Allaire examines the extent to which visual images in *Paradiso* may be owed to, or at least connected with, watermark designs available in Dante's time.

Carranza, Paul. "Philosophical Songs: The 'Song of Iopas' in the *Aeneid* and the Francesca Episode in *Inferno* 5." *Dante Studies*, 120 (2002): 35–51.

Seeks to relate the "song of Iopas" (*Aeneid* 1. 740–46), "the point at which philosophical poetry makes its most emphatic entrance into Vergil's epic," to the *Comedy*, especially *Inferno* 5.

Cuzzilla, Tony. "The Perception of Time in the *Commedia*: *Purg.* 4. 10–12." *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*: posted May 22, 2002, at www.dantesociety.org > Publications > Electronic Journal (EBDSA).

Points out that "medieval psychology assigned the perception of time not to the intellect but to a precise faculty of the sensitive soul," and uses this fact, unremarked by previous commentators on his chosen passage, as the starting-point for a more accurate interpretation. This interpretation also justifies the reading "questa" for "quella" in line, found in Urb. Lat. 366 in the Vatican Library but not adopted even by Federico Sanguineti in his edition based on that manuscript.

Fosca, Nicola. "Beatitudini e processo di purgazione." *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*: posted February 5, 2002, at www.dantesociety.org > Publications > Electronic Journal (EBDSA).

Noting an apparent lack of connection, remarked by various commentators, between the fourth Beatitude ("blessed are they that weep"), sung as Dante leaves the fourth cornice of Mount Purgatory (*Purg.* 19. 49–51), and the vice of *accidia* that is purged there, Fosca uses Aquinas and Augustine to argue that the beatitude is associated with the gift of knowledge, and that ignorance is seen as a form of *accidia*. Fosca concludes that "l'incompatibilità fra dono della scienza e vizio dell'*accidia* pare costituire la base dottrinale del segmento narrativo in cui il canto della terza beatitudine si accompagna all'eliminazione della quarta 'P'."

Hollander, Robert. "The Letters on Dante's Brow (*Purg.* 9. 1–12 and 21. 22–24)." *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*: posted January 31, 2002, at www.dantesociety.org > Publications > Electronic Journal (EBDSA).

Uses the second of his titular passages to re-open the question of whether only Dante-character has the seven Ps inscribed on his forehead in Purgatory, or whether this is a sign of the purgatorial condition shared by all the realm's inhabitants; after reviewing numerous glosses by earlier commentators, concludes that "at no point in the poem is there any evidence that we are meant to believe that anyone but Dante wears these signs carved upon the forehead by the warder of Purgatory."

Iannucci, Amilcare A. "The Americanization of Francesca: Dante on Broadway in the Nineteenth Century." *Dante Studies*, 120 (2002): 53–82.

Richly detailed study of stage and early cinematic productions based on *Inferno* 5 between 1853 and 1908.

Kay, Richard. "Vitruvius and Dante's Giants." *Dante Studies*, 120 (2002): 17–34.

It has not hitherto been thought worthwhile to invoke the "canon of human proportions" derived from Vitruvius' *De architectura* in connection with the giants in *Inferno* 31, because no complete copy of the work (as opposed to the summary in Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum maius*) was known to have been available in Dante's Italy. Now, however, several such copies have been identified, and their attested presence in Dante's cultural situation licenses the reading of the giants episode that Kay goes on to conduct.

Manescalchi, Romano. “‘La tua città’ (*Inf.* VI, 49).” *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*: posted August 2, 2002, at www.dantesociety.org > Publications > Electronic Journal (EBDSA).

Argues that Ciacco’s significant use of the second-person singular possessive pronoun (rather than the first-person plural, given that both he and Dante-*personaggio* are Florentines) reflects “un tirarsi indietro polemico” on the character’s part, connecting him with subsequent condemnations of Florence by Farinata, Brunetto Latini, and the Florentines of *Inferno* 16. Manescalchi concludes, speaking of Ciacco, that “[l]o spessore del personaggio forse è superiore a quanto creduto sinora.”

Marchesi, Simone. “Dante, Virgilio (e Agostino) di fronte ai sette candelabri (*Purgatorio* 29. 43–57).” *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*: posted December 9, 2002, at www.dantesociety.org > Publications > Electronic Journal (EBDSA).

Cites Augustine’s discussion of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (*De doctrina christiana* 2. 7–9) as a previously unnoticed source that further illuminates the symbolic meaning of the seven candelabra in the procession depicted in *Purg.* 29.

Martinez, Ronald L. “Dante’s Forese, the Book of Job, and the Office of the Dead: A Note on *Purgatorio* 23.” *Dante Studies*, 120 (2002): 1–16.

Argues that “in the context of other passages of the *Purgatorio* regarding the importance of caring for the dead and mourning for loved ones, the pilgrim’s memory of grieving for Forese testifies to the poet-pilgrim’s own participation in offices of piety for the dead as they were practiced in late medieval Florence.”

Roglieri, Maria Ann. “Twentieth Century Musical Interpretations of the Anti-Music of Dante’s *Inferno*.” *Italica* 79 (2002): 149–168.

Schildgen, Brenda Deen. “Dante in India: Sri Aurobindo and *Savitri*.” *Dante Studies*, 120 (2002): 83–98.

Studies the connections between the work of Bengali poet Aurobindo (1872–1950) and that of Dante, and claims that “the case of Sri Aurobindo and Dante calls into question the great critical myth of materialist Europe versus religious India, for the major metaphysical poet of India in the twentieth century discovered in the European Dante the epitome of spiritual insight he sought for his own poetry.”

Seriacopi, Massimo. "Riflessioni politiche dantesche secondo due commenti inediti, del Trecento e del primo Quattrocento, al canto VI del *Purgatorio*." *Dante Studies*, 120 (2002): 99–119.

Edits and introduces marginal and interlinear glosses from two *Commedia* manuscripts now in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, one dated 1418 (Pluteo 40. 24) and one datable to the last quarter of the fourteenth century (Pluteo 90 superiore 130).

Verdicchio, Massimo. "Dante at the End of the Millennium." *Italian Quarterly*, 39 (2002): 61–84.

Warner, Lawrence. "The Sign of the Son: Crusading Imagery in the Cacciaguida Episode." *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*: posted September 16, 2002, at www.dantesociety.org > Publications > Electronic Journal (EBDSA).

Disputing recent assertions that the Cacciaguida episode offers an "alternative" to crusading rhetoric, attempts to connect instances of such rhetoric with textual details of *Paradiso* in order to provide a more substantial context within which to read the episode.

Translations

Alighieri, Dante. *The Inferno; A New Verse Translation*. Translated by Michael Palma. New York: W.W. Norton, 2002.

Alighieri, Dante. *The Inferno*. Translated, edited, and with an introduction by Anthony Esolen; illustrations by Gustave Doré. New York: Modern Library, 2002.

Alighieri, Dante. *The Inferno; A New Translation*. Translated by Ciaran Carson. New York: Granta, 2002.

Alighieri, Dante. "Dante Alighieri (1265–1321): Three *canzoni* from the *Convivio*." Translated by Douglas Lackey. *The Philosophical Forum* 33 (2002): 234–53.

Reviews

Applebaum, Stanley. *Dante Alighieri: The "Divine Comedy": Selected Cantos/La "Divina Commedia": canti scelti* (New York: Dover Publications, 2000).

Reviewed by: Fabian R. Alfie, in *Italica*, 79 (2002): 411–13.

Barański, Zygmunt G. *Dante e i segni. Saggi per una storia intellettuale di Dante Alighieri* (Napoli: Liguori, 2001).

Reviewed by: Mary Watt, in *Italica*, 79 (2002): 259–60.

Simon Gilson, in *Modern Language Review*, 97 (2002): 450–51

Bemrose, Stephen. *A New Life of Dante* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2000).

Reviewed by: Guy P. Raffa, in *Speculum*, 77 (2002): 471–73.

Capello, Giovanni. *La dimensione macrotestuale. Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998).

Reviewed by Paul Colilli, in *Italica*, 79 (2002): 262–63.

Cornish, Alison. *Reading Dante's Stars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

Reviewed by: Richard Kay, in *Speculum*, 77 (2002): 500–01.

The Dante Encyclopedia. Edited by Richard Lansing (New York: Garland, 2000).

Reviewed by: Simone Marchesi, in *Italian Quarterly*, 39 (2002): 92–96.

De Poli, Luigi. *La structure mnémonique de la "Divine Comédie"* (Bern: Editions Peter Lang, 1999).

Reviewed by: John Kerr, in *Speculum*, 77 (2002): 163–64.

Pertile, Lino. *La puttana e il gigante. Dal "Cantico dei Cantici" al Paradiso terrestre di Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998).

Reviewed by: Christian Moevs, in *Speculum*, 77 (2002): 970–72.

Raffa, Guy. *Divine Dialectic: Dante's Incarnational Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

Reviewed by: Peter Hawkins, in *Speculum*, 77 (2002): 972–74.

Robey, David. *Sound and Structure in the Divine Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Reviewed by: Steven Botterill, in *Italica*, 79 (2002): 118–20.

One Hundred-and-Twenty-First
Annual Report of the
Dante Society
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The Dante Prize and the Charles Hall Grandgent Award

Since 1887 the Dante Society of America has offered an annual prize for the best student essay on a subject related to the life or works of Dante. The Dante Prize of two hundred and fifty dollars is offered for the best essay submitted by an undergraduate in any American or Canadian college or university, or by anyone not enrolled as a graduate student who has received the degree of A.B. or its equivalent within the past year. In addition, a prize of five hundred dollars, the Charles Hall Grandgent Award, is offered for the best essay submitted by an American or Canadian student enrolled in any graduate program.

All submissions must be sent as e-mail attachments to the Dante Society at dsa@dantesociety.org. Undergraduate essays should be no longer than 5,000 words and graduate essays no longer than 7,000 words. The deadline for submission is June 30.

Each writer should provide a cover page (as the first page of the file) giving the writer's name, local, permanent and e-mail addresses, the title of the essay, the essay category, and the writer's institutional affiliation. The writer's name should not appear on the essay title page (to follow the cover page) or on any other page of the essay since the essays are submitted anonymously to the readers. Quotations from Dante's works should be cited in the original language, and the format of an essay should conform to either the Chicago or MLA Style Sheet guidelines.

Submissions will be judged by a special Committee of the Society. If it should be decided that none of the essays submitted deserves a full prize, the Society may award one prize to two contestants, each to receive one half of the prize, or it may make no award. The results will be announced in early autumn and published in the fall issue of the Society's *Newsletter* and in *Dante Studies*. While the essays remain the intellectual property of the writers, the submitted text will not be returned to authors.

Report of the Secretary

The 121st annual meeting of the Dante Society (and the 48th of the incorporated Dante Society of America) was held at the Harvest Restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on Sunday, 27 April 2003. President **Teodolinda Barolini** called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m. The President expressed the Society's gratitude to outgoing Secretary-Treasurer **Richard Lansing** and outgoing *Dante Studies* editor **Christopher Kleinhenz** for their years of outstanding dedication and service to the Society. Incoming President **Giuseppe Mazzotta** also expressed the Society's thanks to retiring President **Teodolinda Barolini** for her two terms of exemplary leadership and devotion. Capital Campaign chair **Nancy Vickers** formally launched the Campaign by speaking to the membership about its purpose and goals.

After the business meeting, members adjourned to the Carriage House of the Longfellow National Historic Site for a demonstration and discussion of "Illuminating Dante: An Image Archive for Readers of the *Divine Comedy*" presented by **John Ahern**, Chair, and his colleagues, **Karl Fugelso** and **Arielle Saiber**, on the Visual Archive Project Planning Committee.

The balloting in the spring of 2003 resulted in the election of **Guy Raffa** and **Brenda Deen Schildgen** to the Council for a term of three years and election of **Todd Boli** as Secretary-Treasurer for a term of one year. In the summer, **Nancy Vickers** was elected Vice-President for the year 2003–2004.

In the prize competition for 2003, the Dante Prize for the best undergraduate essay was awarded to **Kyle Anderson** of Brigham Young University, and the Grandgent Award for the best essay by a graduate student was awarded to **Heather Webb** of Stanford University. **Christian Moevs**, Chair, and **Alessandro Vettori** served as Prize Committee judges.

The Dante Society met in conjunction with the MLA Convention in San Diego on Sunday, December 28, 2003. **Giuseppe Mazzotta** introduced **Robert P. Harrison** of Stanford University, who spoke on the topic "The Human Authorship of the *Divine Comedy*."

The Society sponsored three sessions on Dante at the Thirty-Eighth International Congress on Medieval Studies, held at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 8–11, 2003:

Dante I: "Dante's Reel Life: The Influence of the *Commedia* on Hollywood Cinema," **Caron Ann Cioffi** (Independent Scholar), Organizer, **Christopher Kleinhenz** (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Chair. **Caron Ann Cioffi** (Independent Scholar): "War Is Hell, with a Happy Ending: Dante and Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella*." **Dennis Looney** (University of Pittsburgh): "Spencer Williams: An African American Filmmaker at the Gates of Hell." **Nicholas R. Havely** (University of York): "Capitalism Is Hell: Harry Lachman's *Dante's Inferno* (1935)."

Dante II: "Conversion and Theological Hermeneutics in the *Commedia*," **Mary A. Watt** (University of Florida), Chair. **Christine Baur** (Fordham University): "Conversion in the *Commedia* and Its Contemporary Philosophical Significance." **Disa Gambera** (University of Utah): "Dante's Statius and the Conversion of Ancient Poetry." **Vittorio Montemaggi** (University of Cambridge): "'Nulla vedere e amor mi costringe': Toward a Theological Hermeneutics for the *Commedia*."

Dante III: "New Perspectives on the *Commedia*," **Caron Ann Cioffi** (Independent Scholar), Chair. **Olivia Holmes** (Yale University): "Ulysses at the Crossroads." **Mary Watt** (University of Florida): "Siena, Verona, Ravenna: Plotting Dante's Iter of Purgation." **Louise Belvedere Caldi** (Independent Scholar): "Art as a Defense against Dante's Anti-Angevin Propaganda."

